

# **The Law: Its Function And Limits Exposition Of Romans 7**

**D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones**

# **THE LAW: ITS FUNCTION AND LIMITS**

## **ROMANS CHAPTER 7:6-25**

"The secret of expounding "Romans seven" is to avoid becoming lost in the details. There is no chapter in the Bible in which it is so easy to "miss the wood because of the trees" as in this 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. It is essential, therefore, that we go on reminding ourselves as to the chapter's fundamental purpose, otherwise we shall become lost in the details. Its primary object, its fundamental theme is to deal with the place and the function of the Law in God's dealings with the human race. Every detail must be considered in the light of that purpose, and of nothing else. To start by thinking that the object of this chapter is that Paul should give us his experience is to miss the whole point. That is not his purpose at all. His fundamental object is to deal with the charge that the Jews and others were bringing against him by saying that his preaching meant that the Law of God was not only useless but actually evil, that it had no function or purpose at all, and that it would have been better if it had never been given. It was the charge that his preaching of justification by faith only, and by grace salvation by grace--was really throwing the Law right out and dismissing it entirely."--**D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones**

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### **ROMANS 7:6**

**"But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." --**

The Apostle gives here what we may describe as his final answer to the criticism that was so constantly brought against his preaching, namely, that it discounted the Law and could lead to nothing but immorality and antinomianism. He has dealt chiefly with the charge of antinomianism in chapter 6, and here in this chapter he specifically takes up the question of the relationship of the Christian to the Law. He is concerned to show that the Law, and any attempt to base life on the Law only, far from helping us to live the godly life actually is a hindrance. He has established that in verse 5. But now, he says, we are in a position to live the godly life because we have finished with that which held us down and which aggravated our problem; we have entered into an entirely new life.

We are considering, therefore, at the moment, the contrast which the Apostle draws between this new life and the old life, and we have dealt so far with the general differences.

We come now to the particular differences which we must look at in detail. This is not something merely theoretical; it is essentially practical, because the charge brought against him was a practical charge, something like the following: "Ah," they said, "this preaching of grace and this preaching of justification by faith sounds very wonderful and of course it pleases people, but the question is, What does it lead to in practice? That is the test; what is it like in ordinary daily life and living?" The Apostle was prepared to meet them on their own ground, and to show that it is because this, and this alone, leads to the practical daily living of holiness that he is preaching it, and rejoicing in it. The big contrast between the old and the new is that we no longer "slave" "in the oldness of the writing, but in the newness of the Spirit." The Apostle regards this distinction as most important, indeed vital; and it is

emphasized frequently in the New Testament. We have seen it in the 3rd chapter of this Apostle's Second Epistle to the Corinthians. It is found also in the Epistle to the Hebrews in chapter 8, where the writer draws a contrast between the old covenant which God had made with the children of Israel through Moses, and the new covenant which He has made through Jesus Christ.

We have here, then, a crucial verse, which is vital in the Apostle's argument in this section, and indeed vital to the whole of his exposition of the Christian salvation in this Epistle. As I have suggested, the remainder of this chapter is but a digression to deal with difficulties that have arisen in people's minds. But verse 6 is the important, crucial statement.

What are the differences, in detail, between life lived "in the Spirit" and the old way of living "according to the writing" and "under the law" and "in the flesh?"

First, there is the difference between an external and an internal relationship to the Law of God, in other words, to morality. This difference is well described in the 3rd chapter of Second Corinthians, verse 3, where Paul says, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." Before, it was, as it were, a writing "with ink," but it is no longer that, it is now a writing with the Spirit. But, further, "not in tables of stone"--that is something outside you. Well, where is the writing now? In "fleshy tables of the heart." The old law was outside a man, written on stones, written with ink, something you looked at with your physical eyes. That is no longer the position. It is now engraven and written and implanted in the fleshy tables of the heart, in the very centre of the personality, in the deepest recesses of our being. We are no longer looking at something outside ourselves, we are considering something that is already within us, and working within us. The Epistle to the Hebrews states it in chapter 8. The author is quoting what Jeremiah had said in the 31st chapter of his prophecy. God says that He is going to make a new covenant with the people--"not the old covenant that I made with your fathers," but a "new covenant." What are the characteristics of the new covenant? "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." Before, He had put the laws on tables of stone which He handed to Moses, and Moses brought them down to the people. But in the new covenant He is going to "put (his) laws into their minds, and

(imprint) write them in their hearts."

Here we meet with a fundamental distinction between the two covenants, the two ways of life. Before you become truly Christian you try to conform to a standard and a pattern outside yourself; but to be a Christian means that the standard is inside you. Of course, in one sense it is still outside, but the important fact is that it is now inside as well. You read it in the Word, but it is also in your mind and in your heart. You are not only looking at something external, you are also aware of that which is within. You do not have to be persuaded to look at that which is outside you; there is now a power within you calling your attention to it, a principle operating in the centre of your personality. The same truth is stated in the Epistle to the Philippians, chapter 2, verse 13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you (inside you) both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The Apostle rejoices that we have become dead to the Law, and that we are delivered from the Law which formerly held us because we can now serve "in newness of Spirit, not in the oldness of the writing." It is within us, in our minds and in our hearts.

Secondly--and the first point necessarily leads to this--this new life in the Spirit means that we have now an understanding which we had not got before. I mean an understanding of the Law and its purpose, and everything that is true of it in the economy of God. What was the trouble with the people under the old dispensation? The Apostle, in 2 Corinthians 3, says that "a veil was upon their hearts" (verses 13-16). That is the trouble with people who are "under the law," who are "in the flesh." Week by week, he says, they hear the reading of the Law of Moses; but they do not understand it because there is a veil over their hearts; their minds are blinded. So though they are studying it, and regard it as important, and though their teachers spend the whole of their lives in expounding it and making comments upon it, and forming those traditions of which we read so much in the Gospels, they are still ignorant of the real meaning of the Law, and lack true understanding. But, says the Apostle, "when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away," and they will begin to understand. The trouble with the man who is not a Christian is that he lacks a fundamental understanding of this new life that God would have us live; he does not see why one should live it, nor what its purpose is. He has no conception of God's purpose with respect to man; he knows

nothing about God's great scheme and plan and purpose of salvation. Those Jews were reading the Old Testament and yet they saw nothing of this at all. That was why they misinterpreted the Law, and thought that, if they but carried out certain commands as they understood them, they would satisfy God. They never saw the real meaning and purpose of the Law. They never realized that it was but to be "our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ." They never saw that its main function was to bring out "the exceeding sinfulness of sin"; they never understood that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." They thought that they could justify themselves by the Law. There was a veil over their hearts, their minds could not function truly. That was their condition under "the oldness of the writing." But the moment a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away, and he sees and understands; his whole position is revolutionized.

The Third thing is, that a man begins to see now the vital distinction between observing the mere "letter" of the law and being concerned about the "spirit" of the law. That is a great distinction, which explains the whole problem of the Pharisees and scribes and doctors of the law. They were only interested in the "letter" of the law, they never understood that what matters, essentially, in the Law is the spirit that is involved. The supreme commentary on that matter is the Sermon on the Mount, and especially the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. The section from verse 17 to the end is devoted almost entirely to an exposure of this false attitude of the Jews and their teachers to the Law of God. They taught and believed that, if you do not actually murder a man in a physical sense, you are not guilty of murder. But our Lord shows very clearly that that is only observing the letter, whereas the Law is concerned about the spirit. If you say "Raca" to your brother, or if you say "Thou fool," you are guilty of murder. Likewise He works it out in terms of adultery and other matters, such as going the second mile, and throwing in the cloak also.

Ultimately it is a question of loving, He says. "Love your enemies." They never understood that principle; they had always regarded these matters in terms of the external letter only, and had never realized that the essential thing about the law is the principle, the spirit, that belongs to true obedience.

The Apostle Paul here and there admits that all this was once true of himself, as for instance, in this very chapter in verses 8 and 9. "I was

alive without the law once, but when the commandment came sin revived and I died." He says virtually the same thing in Philippians 3, in that piece of autobiography in verses 4 to 8. What he had never understood and grasped was that the Law says "Thou shalt not covet." It is not enough simply that you refrain from doing certain things; the question is: Do you sin in your imagination, in your mind and in your heart? Do you "covet" them? "God seeth the heart." Our Lord said to the Pharisees, as recorded in Luke 16:15: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God seeth the heart: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." God reads and is concerned about the heart. So these people came to our Lord one day and asked, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" They thought that they would catch him with this question concerning all their 613 rules and regulations. But He exposed their utter ignorance and blindness by answering, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind, and all thy strength; this is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). The Law is not merely a collection of rules and regulations; it is not a mere matter of the letter; it is the spirit that counts primarily.

The Jews had never seen that. But the moment a man comes into the realm of the Spirit he sees it at once, and he perceives that all his former morality is but as "filthy rags," "dung," refuse. That old righteousness of which he used to boast so much is now of no value at all. Once he realizes the spiritual character of the Law, its positive character, he sees the hopelessly mechanical and superficial nature of his former external correctness. The superficial outward performance still leaves a sink of iniquity; he now learns that it is of no value at all in the sight of God. But it is only the man who is "in the Spirit" who sees this. The tragedy of the moralist, the merely "good" man, is that his native blindness remains, as was the case with so many Jewish teachers. But the moment a man is in the realm of the Spirit he sees that he is utterly condemned, and he is forced to seek his salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Fourth point of difference between the man living this new life "in the Spirit," and the man formerly living his life "in the writing," "under the law" and "in the flesh," is that the former has an entirely new factor in his life, a new motive for his good and righteous living. The old motive was fear of

God. He tried to keep the Law because he was afraid of God. It is the essence of wisdom to try to please God; self-preservation and self-interest dictate such a course. There are many people today who are trying to live the good life simply because they are afraid of hell, afraid of God, and the Judgment. "If only" God and the spiritual realm could be dismissed, "if only" someone could prove that when a man dies that is the end, you would see a difference in their conduct. They are living a life of fear; self-preservation, self-interest are supreme. But even at its best and highest, even when the fear motive is not so prominent as is the case with many so-called intellectuals today -- the people who say they have no interest in Christian dogma and doctrine, but are very interested in morality for the sake of morality--what is the motive? It is self-satisfaction. They desire to keep up their own standard, they want to satisfy their own conception of the moral code, they want to live on good terms with themselves. The Apostle says in the 10th chapter of this Epistle in verse 3, "They, going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." He says, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." They were working very hard, they were trying to produce righteousness, but, he says, "it is their own righteousness." They were very proud of it; they were well pleased with themselves, as the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3: "As touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless." How proud he was of his righteousness and of his keeping of the Law as he had misunderstood it! He tells the Galatians that in this matter of zeal for the Law he was "more exceeding zealous" than others. He was pleasing himself, and was altogether self-satisfied. That is always the case with the Pharisee.

Our Lord has given a graphic picture of all this in Luke 18 in His parable of the two men who went up to the temple to pray, one a publican, one a Pharisee. The Pharisee, he says, walked right to the front and said, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." How supremely self-satisfied was this man! He does not ask God for pardon and forgiveness, or for any help or strength; he is self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied. His whole motive was to please himself. That is the characteristic of the old life lived "according to the law" and "in the flesh."



But what a difference there is when you come to this new life "in the Spirit"! As Christians we are anxious to live this godly, this holy life because we have within us a desire to please God and to please the Lord Jesus Christ; also because we are anxious to express our thanksgiving and our praise. We live the Christian life, not because we are afraid of hell any longer, nor to please ourselves, nor to attain a standard of our own, nor to contrast ourselves with others who are flagrant sinners and failures. We are no longer primarily concerned about self-preservation, because we know that we have been saved, and shall be kept and preserved until "the day of Christ." We live it because we know that it is the way to show our love to God, our gratitude, our thanksgiving, for all that He has done for us. The Apostle expresses this eloquently in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians in chapter 5, verses 14,15: "For the love of Christ," he says, "constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that (in order that) they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again." These words supply the Christian's argument. He says, "I was dead, and Christ died for me that I might have life. Did He die in order that I might go on living for myself as I did before? No, but that I might live for Him who gave Himself for me and rose again from the dead." The motive for Christian living is not even to be holy, it is to please God and to glorify His Name, and a Christian is a man who has realized that high calling. The other man knows nothing of it; he lives for his own glory. The first thing that is true of a Christian is that he is now living unto God and for the glory of God, not for himself. His grand motive is to please God who in his infinite love and mercy and compassion and kindness sent His only begotten Son into this world, even to die for us.

Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all

That is the New Testament way of preaching holiness; that is the only true motive for being holy. We should not go to "holiness meetings" because we have a problem or something we desire to be rid of. We should desire to be rid of our "self." And as preachers we should not appeal to people to come forward to "receive" something, but rather face them with the demand of the crucified, dying Christ, who has given His life, whose body was broken, whose blood was shed, that we might be rescued and redeemed and become the children of God. The motive

should be love, gratitude, praise, thanksgiving to Him who has given Himself for us. The Christian is a man who has an utterly, entirely new motive; it is this love to God.

The Fifth consequence follows directly from that. This man, with this new understanding, and this new motive, lives his life in an entirely new spirit. In the old life, as the Apostle reminds us in the next chapter in verse 15, he was held by a "spirit of bondage." "For," he says, "we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." "The spirit of bondage"! That old life, that life "under the law" is a grievous bondage, a slavery of the worst type, a heavy burden. Any man who is living "under the law" always has a sense of hopelessness and despair. He lives in that spirit; he is always under tension and stress and strain. Oh, the bondage of that old life "under the law" and "in the flesh"! "But now" we are living with an entirely new spirit, and doing our work "in the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." There should be no bondage in the Christian life. "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." The other man does not "hunger and thirst after righteousness"; he is trying to live the good life because he is afraid of God, and afraid of God because he does not want to suffer, and because of his pride. But with the Christian it is entirely different. You cannot be a Christian without it being true of you that you "hunger and thirst after righteousness." Christians are "blessed," happy, and they "shall be filled."

John, in his First Epistle, chapter 5, says, "And his commandments are not grievous." God's commandments were very grievous to the man before he became a Christian; they were a burden. Peter explained to the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) that they were "a yoke and a bondage," too heavy to be borne. But John says that to the Christian "His commandments are not grievous." That is, partly, how we know that we are Christians; we love His commandments now, they are no longer a burden, no longer a terrible task. Paul adds to that in 2 Corinthians 3:17 "The Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Another translation is, "Where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty." When you are in the realm of the Spirit, there is liberty. There is no liberty "under the law"; the task-master is watching you and you are afraid. That was Luther's experience as a monk before his conversion, fasting and sweating in his cell. But when you become a Christian and enter the

realm of the Spirit, "there is liberty." You are set free from the shackles of "that wherein we were held"; you are dead to the Law, you are a free man able to use your powers. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Think of the encouragements enjoyed by the Christian. There were no encouragements in that old life; that is why we were dis-spirited. But all has become wonderfully different. Start with the knowledge of sins forgiven. God said that in the New Covenant He was going to make, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." There is nothing so liberating as to know that all your past sins are forgiven. It is the most liberating thought one can ever have. If you are worried about forgiveness, and worried about your whole standing and position before God, you are of necessity depressed; and in that depressed state Satan has an advantage over you, and you go down still further. There is nothing more wonderful than to know that our sins are forgiven--and we do know it! "There is therefore now, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

But secondly, and summarizing what we have been saying since we began studying chapter 6, we are dead to sin, we are dead to the Law, we are dead to "death." In chapter 6, verses 9,10, we are reminded that "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God." What is true of Him is true of us. He has died once and for all; He will never die again; "death hath no more dominion over him." And it has no dominion over us. This is part of the liberty of the children of God. As a Christian I am dead to the dominion of sin, I am dead to the dominion of the Law, I am dead even to the dominion of death. As a Christian I am simply going to "fall asleep"; I am "in Christ," and therefore I shall never die, I shall never experience the "second death." I am out of the dominion of sin and of the Law and of death. That is the new spirit in which one lives; that is the liberty the children of God enjoy.

God has also said to us--it is a part of the New Covenant--"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." He has said, "I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people." Can anything be more wonderful than that? Nelson said on the morning of the Battle of Trafalgar, "England expects that every man this

day will do his duty." What a motive, what an encouragement! But God says to us, "I am your God, and you are My people. Remember that and live in the light of it." Could a Christian have any greater encouragement?

But God tells us further, of His great purpose with respect to us, and of all He has planned and purposed for us. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification. "We have already met with this at its very highest in chapter 5, verse 10: "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved in his life." He has put us into the life of His Son, and if we are in the life of His Son all else is certain, it is guaranteed. We shall be saved completely and entirely; nothing can stop it. Then think of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me remind you of what we have been told in verse 4 in this chapter, that the Lord Jesus Christ is our husband. "That we might be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead"

He is everything, He is the "All and in all." What an encouragement! The man "in the flesh" knows nothing of this.

Then think of the "hope of glory" and the certainty of our getting there. "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (chapter 5:1,2). There is no encouragement beyond that! "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). This is the way in which the new man, the Christian man, lives his life "in the Spirit." He faces all problems in a new spirit of liberty, rejoicing, hope, thanksgiving and praise.

That leads me to the Sixth great difference between the new and the old man -- the new ability and power which the former has, and of which he is aware. In the old life the man was left to himself. "What the law could not do," says Paul in the 3rd verse of the next chapter, "in that it was weak through the flesh." God gave the Ten Commandments and said--as we loosely translate chapter 10, verse 5 of this Epistle-- "If you keep them, and continue to keep them, you will save yourselves by doing so." But "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; "there is none righteous, no, not one." But what of this new man "in the Spirit?" He has new life; he is a "partaker of the divine nature," he has received new life in Christ, he is born again of the Spirit. Remember Paul's words in 2

Corinthians 3, verse 6--"The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." That is what we need--life and vigour and power--and "the Spirit giveth life." Not only so; the Spirit continues to work within us. Go back to Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13 again: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." How can I do it? Why impose such a task upon me? The thing is impossible. The Patriarchs have failed, the Children of Israel have failed. But there the word stands: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." How can it be done? "For it is God that worketh in you." He is working in you "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." As the result of the Spirit within us, we are able to do things that were unthinkable before.

Paul says in the next chapter of this Epistle, verse 13, "If you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." Ask a man who has not got the Spirit within him to mortify the deeds of the body. To discover the result you have but to read the lives of many of the so-called "Catholic saints" and others who had never seen the truth of "justification by faith only," and who segregated themselves from society, put on camel-hair shirts and often half-starved themselves. They were trying to "mortify the deeds of the body" and the more they tried the more conscious they were of failure. You can go "out of the world," but you take the deeds of the body with you, in your mind and imagination. You cannot get rid of the deeds of the body in that way; but "through the Spirit" you can do so, because you are given new strength. The Apostle says to Timothy in the Second Epistle, chapter 1, verse 7, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Power: love: discipline: or as he has already said in chapter 6, verse 14 of this Epistle, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." John says the same thing in his First Epistle, chapter 4, verse 4: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." Hence, do not be frightened by the devil though he is a powerful enemy. Do not be terrified, do not be alarmed; you now have power, you have strength, you are "in the Spirit"; life "in the Spirit" brings all blessing to you.

So we come to the Seventh distinction which emphasizes the entirely different result of these two lives lived in these entirely different ways. "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:6 that "The letter killeth." It always does so. That old life is a

life of constant struggle, and of constant failure, constant defeat. It becomes increasingly difficult. As you get older you find your powers waning, and the devil seems to become stronger. Your very physical condition leads to new temptations and sins; it gets worse and worse; you are less and less able to resist, and you feel utterly and completely hopeless. It is a kind of living death. But what of this new life in the Spirit? Turn to 2 Corinthians 3:18. The Apostle has said already, "The Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit is Lord there is liberty." Then, praise God, he adds, "But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image (into His image) from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." I have quoted the translation found in the Authorised Version, but there is a better one--"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are being changed." We ourselves are not doing this, it is being done to us, As we behold in the glass the glory of the Lord--as we go on living this life "in the Spirit," with this new understanding and insight and motive and love and power, and all that is so true--as we go on doing all this, we are being "changed into the image of God's dear Son," and "from glory to glory." It is a progressive life; it gets better and better and higher and higher. We become more and more like the blessed Son of God. Do not believe those who say that a Christian on the verge of the grave is in exactly the same position as he was at the beginning. He is "being changed from glory to glory," from one degree of glory to another, and on and on progressively.

This is the truth. Even in this life we can say, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). If you are in the hands of this great Potter; if God, through His Son, and by the Spirit, has begun a work in you, He will never give it up, He will never leave it incomplete; He will complete it, until on that great Day, as Ephesians 5:27 reminds us so gloriously, we shall be "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; holy and without blemish." What shall we say to these things? There is but one thing, I feel, that is fitting. Let us say with Jude, "Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

## ROMANS 7:7

**"What shall we say then, Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known sin, except the law had said, Thou shall not covet." --**

The history of the interpretation of this chapter, and especially from this point to the end, is a most interesting and fascinating one. As I have already been suggesting, I believe that much of the disagreement has been due solely to the fact that so many have not troubled to be guided by the context, but have just come to the chapter in and of itself, and especially this section, and doing so, have gone astray.

I would remind you once more, therefore, of the whole setting; and to do this we must go back to the end of chapter 5. As I am never tired of repeating, the key to the understanding of chapters 6 and 7 of this Epistle is chapter 5. If we are not clear about chapter 5 we cannot possibly understand chapters 6 and 7; and in my view these two chapters form a parenthesis with two parts, chapter 6 being one and chapter 7 the other. The Apostle introduced this parenthesis because of what he had been saying at the end of chapter 5, especially in verses 20 and 21: "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Christ Jesus our Lord." It is that 20th verse that really gives us the key. The Apostle, having been describing how the Christian believer is "in Christ" and what is bound to happen to him because he is "in Christ," suddenly realizes that many might say, "But surely all this is to put the Law on one side, which means that there will be no standard or canon for conduct and for behaviour. It is the Law that has always guaranteed holiness; but your teaching seems to brush the Law aside, and therefore there is nothing to safeguard holy living."

The Apostle therefore takes up this difficulty. In chapter 6, as we saw at length, he takes up the moral aspect and deals with it in terms of "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"

Here, in chapter 7, he deals with the other question, namely, the place of the Law. In chapter 5, verse 20, he had remarked that "The law came in by the side" as it were. Then in chapter 6, verse 14, he had made the statement, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for (because) you

are not under the law, but under grace"; and he seems to rejoice in the fact that Christians are not "under law." But he realizes that there were people who would misinterpret those two statements as meaning that the gospel entirely dismisses the Law, and renders it valueless and pointless.

It is this subject that the Apostle takes up in this 7th chapter. It is the chapter of chapters concerning the Law and its function, and the relationship of the Christian to the Law. It is vitally important that we should be clear as to this particular relationship; so the Apostle expounds it in the body of this chapter, and step by step shows that sanctification by the Law is as impossible as was justification by the Law. In his first four chapters the Apostle is proving that "no man can be justified by the deeds of the law"; he is now equally concerned to show that no man can be sanctified by the Law or by being "under the law."

That is the general theme of the entire chapter; but he divides it into three main sections.

The FIRST is verses 1-6, with which we have already dealt. It supplies a general statement to show that as Christians we are in an entirely new relationship to the Law, and that that is essential in order that "we may bring forth fruit unto God," serving God in "newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

We now come to the SECOND section. It is best to regard it as running from verse 7 to verse 12. Verse 13 then sums it up and also acts as a point of transition from this section to the next, which starts at verse 14 and goes on to the end of the chapter.

In verses 7 to 12 the Apostle's purpose is to vindicate the Law, the Law in and of itself, the Law as such; and to prove that the Law must never be held responsible for our failure to keep it. It is a vindication of the character of the Law. He absolves it completely from every charge of involvement in our guilt. Verse 13, as I say, is a kind of summing up of that argument and an introduction to the next section, verses 14-25.

In verse 14 to 25 he gives a demonstration in practice, and from the experimental standpoint, of what he has been saying in the second section. He clearly felt that this was necessary in order to show how the Law not only fails to deliver us, but actually aggravates our problem. He ends by showing that, though the Law leaves us in a state of complete



hopelessness, there is nevertheless a hope. So we have the triumphant cry, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

To recapitulate: the first section, verses 1-6, really says everything; and what Paul does in these two further sections is merely to elaborate what he has said there. His whole case in the first section, as we have already seen, is to say that we are no longer "under the law," but joined to Christ, so that we can now "serve in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." These two sections, 7-13 and 14-25, are nothing but a working out in detail, and a demonstration of, that original contention, and a defence of it against possible misunderstanding.

We are now ready to start upon this second section beginning at verse 7, where we read "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" The Apostle has been making certain statements about the Law, and he imagines someone saying: "Well, there is only one conclusion to draw from what you have been saying, and that is, that the Law, the Law that was given through Moses, is something evil, is something bad in and of itself." He seems to imagine this objector saying, further, "You had already made two statements which disturbed me. You had already insulted the Law by saying that it only 'came in on the side'; and then you had gloried in the fact that we are not 'under the law but under grace.'" But you have gone further now. You have said in verse 5, "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law"--aggravated, produced by the Law--"did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Surely you are saying therefore that the law is sin? You rejoice in the fact that we are not "under law" in exactly the same way as you have rejoiced that we are not "under sin." Therefore sin and law must be synonymous; there is no difference between them. The Law is bad, sinful, harmful, something that leads only to our death. Is that what you are saying?"

At once the Apostle answers with his famous formula, translated in the Authorized Version as "God forbid," but which should be translated as "Far be it from our thoughts," "Let it be unthinkable." That suggestion, he says, should never enter one's mind. He has already used the same formula in chapter 6, and before that in chapter 3. He said in chapter 6, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid," Here again he says that this is something that no one should ever entertain. He virtually says the following: "As there are people who think such things, we must investigate, we must examine this, because if you really

draw that conclusion from what I have been saying about the Law, the fact of the matter is that you have completely misunderstood my whole teaching." So he has to introduce a subsidiary parenthesis--a parenthesis within a parenthesis--in order to make it plain.

I am labouring the point for this reason. In this section, and the one that follows, the Apostle puts his case in personal terms. That is what has caused all the argument and the disputation. It has been assumed that the Apostle's main purpose in this chapter is to relate his experience. In my view that is not the case at all. He would never have written what we have from verses 7 to 25 were it not for the likelihood of the misunderstanding of what he had said in verses 1 to 6, indeed of what he had already said at the end of chapter 5. In other words the Apostle's object in this chapter is not to give his experience but to make clear his teaching about the relationship of the Christian to the Law, and to show how the law can never sanctify us any more than it could ever justify us.

So he says "God forbid" to the suggestion that "the law is sin"; it just means that the objector has misunderstood the entire purport of his teaching. But he does not leave it at a mere general statement. He goes on to say, "Nay"--"not only is that not right, but on the contrary." Such is the force of the added expression. On the contrary, says the Apostle, the position is not merely that I am not teaching what your question suggests, I am teaching its exact opposite.

In what ways is the Apostle's teaching the very opposite of saying that "the law is sin?" He gives us two answers.

The FIRST is, "I had not known sin but by the law." To understand this answer it is essential that we should again start with a negative statement, because this has been, and can be, misunderstood. Obviously the Apostle is not saying that he was once not aware of the fact of sin, of the fact that he had sinned and that others had sinned. He cannot mean that, because there are many non-Christians who are well aware that certain things are wrong, and who say that certain things are sinful. There is a kind of general knowledge of sin in all people, so the Apostle could not possibly say that he had no knowledge whatsoever of sin apart from the Law. His meaning is that he was not aware of the real nature of sin until the Law made it clear to him. It is the Law, he says, that brought him to a right understanding of the essential character and nature and

meaning of sin. Now this is, in many ways, but to repeat what he had said in chapter 3, verse 20. "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his (God's) sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." His point there was that the Law, far from justifying, can do no more than give us a knowledge of sin. He is saying the same thing here. It is the Law of God alone that really gives us a right conception of the true character and nature of sin.

This is a tremendous proposition. The real trouble with the unregenerate is that they do not know and understand the truth about sin. They have their moral code, they believe that certain things are right and certain things are wrong; but that is not to understand sin. The moment a man understands the true nature and character of sin he becomes troubled about his soul and seeks for a Saviour. So the trouble with people who are not seeking for a Saviour, and for salvation, is that they do not understand the true nature of sin. It is the peculiar function of the law to bring such an understanding to a man's mind and conscience. That is why great evangelical preachers three hundred years ago in the time of the Puritans, and two hundred years ago in the time of Whitefield and others, always engaged in what they called a preliminary "law work." In their preaching of the Gospel they generally started with a presentation of the Law. They knew that man would not understand salvation unless he understood the nature of sin. So they expounded the Law of God, showing its relevance, and by means of it they brought men and women to an understanding of what sin really means in the sight of God. Now nothing but the Law, says the Apostle, does that. "Without the law" he had no real knowledge of sin. "I had not known sin"--I would never have discovered what it really means "were it not for the law." That is his first statement.

But he makes a SECOND statement, which illustrates the first. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shall not covet." Here the "for," introduces an illustration. Says the Apostle, "I can make plain to you what I mean when I say that apart from the law I would never have known the real character of sin. For instance, I would never have known the meaning of lust were it not that the law had said, Thou shall not covet."

Here, again, is a vitally important statement. What is the meaning of "lust?" It means coveting, "to covet"; it means what is called

"concupiscence" in verse 8. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence." The term means "desire after anything forbidden." We have to be careful about the word "lust." It is actually a word that means in and of itself simply "desire," "a strong desire." You remember how our Lord says to the disciples, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). The word used there is actually the word "lust." So the word in and of itself is neutral, but the context will always make it clear as to whether it is to be taken in a neutral sense, or in a good sense, or in a bad sense. Usually the word "lust" is employed in an evil sense. It means a desire, a craving for something forbidden by God. So the Apostle is saying, "I would never have known what lust means were it not for the law," "which says, Thou shalt not covet, Thou shalt not desire in that way."

As for the meaning of "the law" here, Paul doubtless meant the Ten Commandments, as they are given in the book of Exodus, chapter 20, and particularly the tenth Commandment which says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's." You must have noticed the difference between that tenth Commandment and the others. The others say, "Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness." But here there is a change--"Thou shalt not covet." At once we are introduced to the distinction between an outward action and a happening within a man's inner being. But we must not overpress this, because the idea of coveting is implied in the others also.

The Apostle is really saying two separate things. The first is, "I would not have known that lust was sin in and of itself if the law had not taught me so." That was undoubtedly true of the Apostle before his conversion as it was true of all the Pharisees, they thought of sin only in terms of external actions. As long as a man did not perform an evil act, he was not guilty of sin. So the Apostle is saying, in the first place, that he would never have realized that coveting, lusts, evil thoughts and imaginations, are sin, were it not that the Law had given him enlightenment.

Our Lord was at great pains to bring this point home to the Jews, and especially to the Pharisees in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, verse 21 to the end of the chapter, he deals with this one great matter. The Pharisees were teaching the people, and deceiving

themselves also to think that as long as you did not actually murder a person you were not guilty of murder. But our Lord goes on to show them that if you say "Raca," if you say to your brother "Thou fool," you are already guilty of murder in your heart with respect to that person. And he says the same with the question of adultery. They said that as long as a man had not actually committed an act of adultery he was not guilty of adultery. But Christ replied to this: "If you look upon a woman to lust after her you have committed adultery with her already in your heart, and you are therefore guilty of adultery." They did not know that; they did not understand the real meaning of lust. They did not realize that lust is sinful in and of itself; so our Lord gave them these illustrations in order to show them that their fundamental conception of the Law was wrong, that the law is essentially spiritual, that the Law is concerned about a man's heart.

On another occasion when He was asked about the Law, He said that the first, the great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. And the second is like unto it, Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself." That is the Law, not just tithing mint, rue, anise and cummin, and all the little details and minutiae. The Law, Christ says, is spiritual, it is concerned with a man's heart and his ultimate attitude to God. That is the meaning of the Law. Now, says the Apostle, it was only when I really understood the meaning of the Law that I understood the truth about lust. I came to see that to covet is as reprehensible as to commit ... a deed. He had never seen that before. It was the Law, the true understanding of the Law, that opened his eyes to this question of lust and of coveting.

But then the Apostle makes a second statement with respect to the matter: "I had not known lust," he says, "except the law had said, Thou shall not covet." The second meaning is something like this: "I had never understood the power of lust and of desire within me until I was really enlightened by a true understanding of the law." Take this word "know." Notice that he uses the word "know" twice--at least it is here in the Authorized Version -- "I had not known sin, but by the law. I had not known lust, except the law had said..." Here it occurs twice; as also in most of the other translations. But in actual fact the Apostle used a different word the second time, and I am amazed that the translators have not concentrated on that. He does not use the same word in the Greek in the two places. The second "know" is much stronger than the

first. It means, "to know absolutely"; it means "to know as the result of reflection and experience." The first indicates a kind of apprehension. Says the Apostle, "I would never really have comprehended the meaning of sin but by the law"; but then he adds, "I would never have understood and come to feel in the depth of my being, and have a full understanding and experience of the meaning of lust, and the part lust plays in a man's life, were it not that the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." In other words, the law had not only brought Paul to see that to lust was to sin, it had brought him to see the terrible power of lust in his own life. He certainly includes that second meaning as well as the first. So the law had rendered this great service to him. He will show us this in greater detail in the verses which follow, but here he expresses it in a general way. He says in effect, I really had no true understanding of sin until the law enlightened me. I had been oblivious of the power and the place of lust in my life until this command about coveting arrested me, and I suddenly began to realize the truth about myself.

Note then the Apostle's argument. You must not say that "the law is sin," says Paul, because it is the Law that has brought me to see the meaning of sin, and my own sinful condition as the result of this power of lust within me. "God forbid," he says, that anyone should think that I am teaching that the law is something sinful or evil; I am saying the exact opposite. Do not misunderstand me, he says in effect, the fact that I say that the Law cannot sanctify a man does not mean to say that I am arguing that the law is useless. The fact that I have said that the law "aggravates" sin does not mean that the law is sinful. No; the Law itself is excellent, and I thank God for it. I would never have known, and had a true understanding and apprehension of sin, were it not for the law. And, especially, I would never have understood this matter of lusting and the place of lusting in my life, were it not that this commandment had come and convicted me. Such is the Apostle's argument in verse 7. Obviously, he has not finished his explanation of his attitude to the Law; this is but the beginning of the matter. He will go on to work it out in greater detail.

But before we come to Paul's further explanations let us mark this great lesson and underline it. Are we clear in our minds that to lust after a thing is to sin? Are we, as the Apostle says was once his case, in the position of thinking that as long as we do not carry out a desire we have not been guilty of sin? There are many who teach that error. For instance, the

Roman Catholic teaching is that as the result of being baptized by the Church you are cleansed from original sin. Then they quite logically go on to teach that to lust is not to sin; it is only acts committed that constitute sin. That is a part of the whole error of that particular Church with regard to salvation.

You can sin in your imagination, in your thought. That is as much sin, says our Lord, as the act. Obviously there are differences in consequences, but in the sight of God the one is sin as much as the other. Our Lord's words are, "he hath already committed adultery with her in his heart, and "God seeth the heart." Our Lord said to the Pharisees, "Ye are they that justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). You Pharisees, who stand up at the corners of the street, and in the market-place, and say, Look at us. We have never committed murder, we have never committed adultery. God sees your hearts, and He knows that they are black, that they are full of sin. You have not done these things as acts but you have done them in your hearts, in your thoughts, and in your imaginations, and that is abomination in the sight of God.

This is obviously crucial teaching. It is an essential part of the Apostle's whole exposition of the great doctrine of salvation; and it is to the extent to which we are clear about this that we shall be able to follow his argument in the remainder of this particular chapter. The thing that awoke the Apostle to see his need of a Saviour from heaven was this question of lusting. There he was convicted; but only so when he saw the true character of the Law as essentially spiritual. Thereby he saw the true nature of sin. In other words, there is no better way of testing our understanding of the Christian doctrine of salvation than to examine our understanding of the true nature of sin and especially as regards this question of lust.

It is essential that we should be clear about the setting and the context of the argument of the Apostle here, because if we fail to carry this in our minds we shall inevitably go astray when we come to the later verses and their detailed teaching. The great principle is that Paul is showing that the Law is not sin. Thank God it is not! Thank God it does, and has done, what it was meant to do. It brought the Apostle to a knowledge of sin, and especially in terms of coveting. God grant that we all may be able to join

him in saying the same thing, and in the offering of praise and thanksgiving to God for His holy Law, and for His work in us and upon us.

### **ROMANS 7:8**

**"But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence, for without the law sin was dead." --**

Here, in this 8th verse, the Apostle carries his argument a step further. He has made his fundamental positive statement about the character of the Law and what it does; then having done that he moves on. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. "But" -- and here comes the explanation; and it is a very profound explanation. Why has the law had that effect of aggravating sin and lust in one's members? Oh, he says, the answer is because of the nature and the character of sin. The trouble arises not because of the Law, but because of sin. What, then, causes sin to do this? Here is the answer "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence."

What does that mean? Perhaps the best way of approaching this 8th verse is to take the various expressions one by one, starting with the word "sin." By "sin" Paul does not merely mean acts of sin.

Come to the next expression. "Sin," he says, "taking occasion." Here we have a most fascinating expression. We shall find that he uses it again in verse 11, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment." The root meaning of the word translated here "taking occasion" is "to make a start from a place." It is a word used to describe a place from which you have set out on a journey, a starting point. "Sin, having a starting point in the commandment." But you can also think of it in terms of military operations, and in this sense it becomes a base in which you make your preparations, in which you train your troops and assemble your artillery and your armaments, and from which -- you set out upon your campaign. So we have, "Sin, making use of the commandment as a base of operations." Or indeed, you can use yet another idea; and some of the translators have adopted it. It is a very interesting and picturesque one, which perhaps brings out the meaning even better than both the others. "Sin, using the law as a fulcrum." The meaning of the word "fulcrum" is clear. If you are confronted by the problem of moving a great weight, a



stone or some similar object you find that in the ordinary way you cannot move it at all. You therefore proceed to get a long bar, the longer the better. Next you put a log of wood or something solid on which the bar can rest fairly near the object you want to move. You then place one end of the bar under the object, and by pressing on the other end and using the block of wood as a fulcrum you are able to lift and to move the weighty object which you are anxious to move. The word rendered here as "taking occasion" was very frequently used in that way. So we can translate it like this: "Sin, using the law as a fulcrum, was able to move our resistance and to produce the result that it was anxious to produce." This wonderfully helps to bring out the idea that the Apostle has in mind.

Here, no doubt the Apostle is referring in particular to the Tenth Commandment with its whole idea of not coveting--"Thou shalt not covet." Now, he says, what has happened is that sin has taken this commandment about coveting, this prohibition of coveting, and it has used it as a fulcrum, or a military base of operations. To do what? "To bring to pass in me." "it wrought in me." this word "wrought," again, is very interesting and important; it is a very powerful word. It means "to work powerfully," or "to bring to a firm conclusion," to "accomplish" something. It is not a mere attempt; it meets with success, it is a thoroughgoing operation. So we can translate it thus, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought powerfully in me"; "wrought mightily in me," "really did produce an end result in me in this respect." It is important that we should give the full weight to that word "wrought."

What did it bring to pass? it wrought in me "all manner of concupiscence." What is "concupiscence?" The same word as used by the Apostle in the previous verse, is translated "lust." "For," he says, "I had not known sin but by the law, for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Concupiscence means lust, desire, in an evil sense. It means that whole state of the heart, and of the person, in which desires, lusts and passions are in control.

There are two statements in the book of Genesis which put this so perfectly that nothing is necessary but to quote them. The first is in Genesis 6:5, the description of the people before the Flood. We are told that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." That was the characteristic of man in the antediluvian period. That is concupiscence! Men were controlled and consumed by lusts and

passions and desires. Then there is a second description in Genesis 8:21 which really says the same thing. "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." So what the Apostle says is that sin, using the commandment as a fulcrum, wrought mightily in him to produce all manner of such lusts and desires. He is writing deliberately, and he says "all manner"; so we must interpret it as such; we must not water it down. He says, I seemed to be filled with this kind of thing, of all conceivable types. All manner of desires and lusts were within my mind and heart; I seemed to be nothing but a mass of corruption, and of evil thoughts, desires and imaginations; I seemed to be a cesspool of iniquity.

So we sum up his statement by saying that sin used the Law as a base to produce such an effect. The very prohibitions of the law gave sin the very opportunity it desired; it roused it, really gave it something to work on as a fulcrum, and it moved in that terrible and terrifying manner.

So far we have the Apostle's general statement. But let us examine it. The first thing it tells us is something about the nature and the character of sin. How do you define sin, what is your notion of it? Obviously, we must not say that sin is merely something negative. There are many who regard and describe sin in that way. The biblical doctrine of sin is most unpopular today. There are those who say that the old notion of sin ought to be dismissed, that it has done much harm, that it made people condemn themselves and feel hopeless and pessimistic. They say that sin should not be used as a term at all, that it is too negative, that it is psychologically bad for us because it produces a kind of mournful person. I remember reading a sermon once by a well-known "liberal" preacher. Most of the sermon was a denunciation of Charles Wesley's great hymn, "Jesus, Lover of my soul," and particularly the verse which says:

Just and holy is Thy name,  
I am all unrighteousness;

Vile and full of sin I am,

Thou art full of truth and grace.

He abominated the words. He felt it was a disgrace, and that it should be taken out of the hymn-book and never sung again. He tried to ridicule it by saying that when a man is applying for a post he does not go to his prospective employer and say, "Vile and full of sin I am."

But when you are facing God, then the whole situation is entirely different. Such is the ridiculous position in which people land themselves when they deny biblical truth and doctrine.

But that is the common attitude today. They say that we must not talk about sin as something in and of itself; what we really mean is that there are certain things we would like to see in a man that are not there. In other words, we must not say that a man is a bad man, what we should say is that he is not a good man. We must not say man is positively evil; what we should say is that he has not yet developed to the extent he should have done. The concept is purely negative; it merely takes note of the absence of certain qualities, or, if they are there, they need to be drawn out. Education and culture and training will bring them out; but we must cease to say that people are positively evil and--to repeat Charles Wesley's term--"vile." What is called sin, if we want to use the term, is something which is entirely negative, mere deprivation as it were, rather than something that is essentially positive.

Clearly all that is something which the Apostle Paul would reject in toto, because his whole case depends upon this, that sin is a positive power that can use the lever, can put the pressure on the end of the bar, and use the fulcrum. You cannot move weights with negatives. You cannot lift weights with a mere absence of something. No, the whole concept, the whole picture, the very phraseology that he employs is designed to bring out the idea that sin is positive. And not only positive, but powerful in the extreme. It is something that can "take occasion," that can have "a base of operations," that can "use a fulcrum," that can move great objects and obstacles--it can work powerfully.

And, of course, in saying that here, in this picturesque way, the Apostle is simply repeating what he has already been saying earlier in this Epistle in other language. In chapter 5:21 he says, "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That as sin hath reigned unto death . . ." Sin is something so powerful that it can "reign"; it is a monarch with tremendous power. It is an empire. Then Paul says the same thing in chapter 6:14 in the words, "for sin shall not have dominion over you." It has dominion over everyone else. Every man who is not a Christian is under the dominion of sin. Yet people say that sin is but a negative phase, just the absence of good qualities. It is positive, says Paul; it is so powerful that it can move

men and throw them over. It knocked down all the patriarchs. He then uses even stronger language in chapter 6, verses 16, 17: "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants (slaves) to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that we were the servants of sin, but we have obeyed from the heart that form of sound doctrine which was delivered unto you." Sin is a slave-master, sin is that which controls people absolutely.

There is nothing which is so foreign to the biblical teaching than this notion that sin is entirely negative. I will go further. Would you know how strong sin is? Well, Paul tells us here. Sin is as powerful as this, that it can even use God's own holy Law to its own ends. I do not know of a greater estimate of strength and of power than this. God gave His holy law through Moses. Ah yes, says Paul, but sin was strong; it was as strong as this, it even used God's holy Law as a fulcrum to bring its own purposes to pass. And it succeeded. It wrought powerfully, it achieved, it accomplished what it wanted to do. Even God's holy Law could not resist it. Such is the measure of the positive character of sin, and the strength of sin. There is no doctrine, perhaps, which is more important in a practical sense in the life of this country and the world at this moment than just this doctrine.

How then does sin use the Law? How does it use the Law as a fulcrum, a base of operation, a starting point? The first part of the answer is this; it does so by arousing in us the element of rebellion that is in us. That is a fundamental postulate of the Bible. Does anyone dispute it? If so, the answer is found in the next chapter, chapter 8, verse 7: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." He does not say merely that we occasionally do things that God has told us not to do. "The carnal mind"--and that is sin in control--"is enmity against God." But many a modern man says--I have been told it many times--"I have always believed in God, I have always tried to worship God." But the God they have worshipped has not been God but rather a figment of their own imaginations. The Scripture says that the carnal mind, is enmity against God. The Apostle repeats the same statement in different words in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapters 4 and 5, and elsewhere in such expressions as, "being enemies," and "alienated in your minds by wicked works."

What happens is this. The Law comes and addresses a man, and at once the antagonism to God that is within him, the spirit of rebellion, is aroused and aggravated, and his self-assertiveness comes into play. This is because man "in sin" is not prepared to bow to anyone. He is self-satisfied, he is self-contained, he is independent; and so he resents the idea of law. That is why many people say that they do not believe in God. They resent the idea that there is anyone to whom they must bow the knee. They are men, twentieth-century men, who stand on their own feet! They boast of their abilities, their wisdom and knowledge. The natural man hates this notion that there is anyone, even God, before whom he has to bow down and submit himself. He is not going to be a suppliant to anyone, he wants to live his own life in his own way. Why shouldn't he? And so he says that the whole notion of God is nothing but a projection of the Victorian idea of a father. That is what the clever people, the psychologists and others are saying. The Victorian father, the stern Victorian father, repressed his children, he gave commandments, and his word was law. His children had to do what he said. Most people, they say, have projected that into infinity and say that that is God. Of course, it is something purely psychological! In saying all that, they are, of course, but showing this enmity, this hatred of God, this spirit of rebellion that is in us. So the great characteristic of an age like this, which does not believe in God, is lawlessness, dislike of discipline and order in any shape or form. People today have a rooted dislike of law and of sanctions and of punishment. We have almost reached the state in which they do not believe in punishing anyone; a murderer almost becomes a hero who engages public sympathy. The prisoner gets more sympathy than his victim. Thus the whole idea of right and wrong is rapidly disappearing from the human mind.

In essence, sin is lawlessness. It is the rooted objection to any law, any commandment, any prohibition, any notion of wrath and of punishment. This works itself out in endless ways. There is no longer discipline in the home or in the school. Children are not to be punished however much they misbehave themselves. If they are punished the parents will soon be demanding an interview with the head-master or the teacher and protesting against their discipline. In New York City, I am told, it has reached the point that no one ever fails an examination in the schools; all are passed automatically. And for this reason, that the teachers, the head-masters and others are afraid of the physical consequences to

themselves if they fail a pupil or a candidate. There is soon to be an enquiry into this whole problem of these adolescents, these juvenile delinquents in New York City who are taking the law into their own hands. This attitude towards anything which savours of discipline and punishment is one of the ultimate ends of this lawlessness. The moment the natural man hears of the Law he reacts against it and resents it. What was already there is aggravated. And sin is the root cause. Sin was already present; the Law comes in with its prohibition, and sin uses it as a fulcrum and it presses down, with the result that there is greater sin than there was before. Thus the Law aggravates the situation because of this spirit of lawlessness that is in us, and it actually incites us to sin.

But there is another way in which sin works. When the Law comes to us with power, and especially when it puts this emphasis upon not coveting and lusting, man in sin reacts also in another way. He says, "This is going too far, this is unfair. I am prepared to agree that there are certain things that I should not do; and that if I do them I am wrong. That is a matter of actions, and a man is responsible for his actions. But now you tell me that the Law says "Thou shalt not covet," that I am not even to desire; that if I have within myself a longing for these things, a hankering after them even though I do not actually engage in them, then I am guilty of sin." I am speaking here, of course, about that which really comes out of the heart and not about a temptation from the outside. I am taking the case of a man who enjoys sinning in his mind, in his imagination and in his heart, but who feels that because he has not actually committed an outward act of sin all is well with him. When the Law comes and says to the man "Thou shalt not covet," and tells him that to covet is sin, there is an immediate reaction. He says, "Now this going too far, this is an impossible standard, this is unfair to me. It is not unreasonable as long as it stops at actions, but if it is going to examine my thoughts and my innermost imaginations, why, this is a sheer impossible position. I object to this. I am willing to go on living a moral life, but my own inner life is my own, and no outside authority shall come in there." He hates the notion that a man's innermost thoughts are open to God, and that evil thoughts are as reprehensible in His sight as are outward deeds and actions. And so when the Law comes in, in that way, sin uses it as a fulcrum and it aggravates the situation. It puts a man into a bad temper, he is annoyed, and he feels that he is being dealt with unfairly and unjustly; and in that state he is going to sin more than he ever did before.

Then there is a third way in which sin works; and this from the practical standpoint is one of the most important of all. "Sin (using the commandment as a fulcrum) wrought in me all manner of concupiscence." How? By putting ideas into my mind which were not there before. The Law comes to me and tells me not to do some particular thing; but in so doing it sets me thinking about that thing. I was not thinking about it before, but now I begin to do so. And as I begin to do so I begin to like the idea; the thing appeals to me. Thus lust is kindled, I want to do this, and I proceed to do it. The Law, by telling me not to do it, brought it into my mind; the Law has introduced me to it.

And not only that, but it may introduce me to thoughts and ideas about which I was completely ignorant before. I may be reading a book which tells me certain things, for instance, about certain horrible perversions of which I had never heard and which had never bothered me, or ever tempted me because I was not aware of their existence. But I now read a book which warns me against these things, and the moment I begin to read, something stirs within me and my curiosity is aroused. I ask myself, "Why do people do this? It must be pleasing, it must be attractive." My curiosity, then begins to work and I begin to see myself doing this. I am doing all this in my imagination and I am enjoying it. That is how sin works.

The classic statement of all this is found in the Epistle to Titus, chapter 1, verse 15: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." If your mind is defiled, everything that comes into it is going to be defiled and twisted. Nothing will come in pure; it will have a particular angle on it, it will be coloured by the spectacles of your impure heart. Purity is not pure to the undefiled; the moment it makes contact it becomes impure "But even their mind and conscience is defiled."

Paul's argument here is that the pure Law of God coming with its prohibitions and its restraints and its commandments, inflames our passions, rouses within us a desire to do the very things it prohibits, and introduces me to things I never knew of before. What is the result of this? "It brought forth fruit unto death." In other words the Apostle is here really giving us an explanation of what he said in verse 5 concerning "the motions of sin." Verse 8 throws light on verse 5. The Law of God is not

sin; it is purity itself. But it reveals to us the nature of sin, it helps us to see that coveting is sin. What has happened then? Oh, the terrible truth about man is that this powerful thing called sin is able even to use that pure Law of God as a fulcrum to produce all evil in me. It provides it with a base of operations, the enemy "comes in as a flood," and I end by being worse than I was before. That is the explanation, says the Apostle.

Let us now apply this teaching, and draw some practical help from what the Apostle is saying here.

FIRST of all, if we are not clear as to the nature of sin we shall never really understand the teaching of the Bible. The whole of the biblical teaching concerning salvation is based upon a clear understanding of what sin really is. There is no hope of our understanding anything apart from this. We shall never see why we have to die to the Law if we do not understand the nature of sin. We shall never see why the Son of God had to come and die; we shall never see the necessity of regeneration and a rebirth. That is why so many people think that they can "decide for Christ" as they are. How can they if this is true? This controls everything. Most of our troubles today are due to a failure to grasp and understand this biblical doctrine of sin. Here in this one verse we are given a view, and an exposure of it, such as you will scarcely find anywhere else with such clarity. It is this terrible power that can even use God's Law as a fulcrum to bring to pass its own nefarious ends.

In the SECOND place, what the Apostle has said about sin, and the way in which it uses the Law as a fulcrum, proves to the hilt his double contention. The first was that no man can ever be sanctified by and through the Law. How can a man be sanctified by the Law when sin is reigning in him, and can even use that Law as a fulcrum? His second contention was that a man never can be sanctified until his old relationship to the Law has been abolished. He has to die to the Law and to be married to Another before he can be sanctified, and this too he proves. As long as sin is present, all the Law does is to provide a fulcrum to make things worse. How can we be sanctified, therefore, while we are "under the law?" The Apostle reduces the whole thing to an absurdity. He is proving his contention; and he does so in a dual sense.

If I did not know that the Son of God had died for me and my sins, and had given me new life; if I did not believe that I am "in Christ" and married



to Him, I would be of all men most hopeless and miserable. I cannot live a truly good life, or practise any true morality or ethic, in my own strength and power, because of this terrible, devastating, awful power which is called sin.

So thank God for this 8th verse in Romans, chapter 7, which not only illuminates the doctrine of this particular chapter for us, but also helps us to understand something of why life is as it is today.

The modern man does not understand the biblical doctrine and teaching concerning sin. But as Christians we have been enlightened; the light of truth drives us to Christ, and makes us rejoice that we are in Him, married to Him, and that we no longer live "in the oldness of the letter, but in the newness of the Spirit."

### **ROMANS 7:9**

**"For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." --**

The Apostle, here, is obviously continuing what he has just been saying. The word "For" reminds us of that at once. He is going to follow out the argument and give us a further exposition and explication of it. So far he has been stating facts, and showing that what he has said about the Law in verses 1 to 6 of this chapter does not mean or imply that the Law is sin and bad and evil.

Having made those statements of fact he now comes to an analysis of the facts. This is frequently the Apostle's method. He makes a statement, he lays down his facts, and then proceeds to analyse them. That is what he does here. It is a personal statement as to what was once upon a time true of him. It is a remarkable and very important statement because of the terminology he uses, the way in which he puts it, and the expressions he employs. They clearly need careful handling. If they are taken at their face value, as it were, and out of their context, we could easily draw conclusions which would be the exact opposite of what the Apostle desires us to draw. Indeed we might draw conclusions which would lead us to say that the Apostle contradicts himself. We must therefore look at his statement with extraordinary care.

Let us start with a general analysis of the statement. What he is

concerned to show is the difference that what he calls "the coming of the law" made to him. He first tells us what the position was before the Law "came" to him; sin was dead, and he was alive. But then the Law came, and what happened? There was a complete reversal--"sin revived, and I died." Such is the statement we are examining--the position before the law "came," and the position after the Law "came." In between the two is "the coming of the law" to the Apostle.

The best way of approach to this statement is to get clear in our minds what he means by "without the law." "For," he says, "without the law sin was dead." Then he says, "I was alive without the law once." What does he mean by "without the law?" It is just here that we have to be careful. Obviously he is using his words in a relative manner. he says, "without the law sin was dead." "I myself was alive without the law." "Without" means "apart from." In Scotland they often use the expression "out with," which comes to the same thing. It means "in the absence of law." "In the absence of the law, sin is dead." "I myself, in the absence of law, was once alive."

But what does Paul mean by saying that there was a time when he was "without the law?" Obviously, it must be a relative statement, for this good reason, that there has never been a time in the history of the human race when it has been without law. There was even law in the Garden of Eden, and ever since man sinned and fell he has always been "under" that fundamental Law, the Law of God. The Apostle has proved that at length in chapter 5. He has pointed out, for instance, that that is the reason why "death reigned from Adam to Moses." It is the only possible explanation of that statement. We therefore assert that there has never been a time when there has been no law. But if that is true in general, it was particularly true of the Jews, and therefore true of the Apostle Paul himself. Every Jew was born under the Law of Moses, and yet, here, he seems to say that at one time he was alive "without the law" and lived apart from the Law. Clearly, therefore, he must be using his terms in a relative manner. Indeed we shall find that he does so with all the terms that appear in this statement. What he is saying is, that as far as his experience was concerned, he was living without the Law, apart from the Law. In other words the Law was not really doing its work in him; he was virtually in a position as if there was no Law. There never was such a position, of course, but as far as his knowledge and his experience of the

Law went, that was the position. As we look at the other terms this will become much clearer.

Let us move to the next term, which is, "When the commandment came, sin revived and I died." "When the commandment came!" But the commandment had always been there! The Law had been given through Moses long centuries before Paul was ever born--fourteen centuries--and the basic fundamental law for all mankind was always there from the beginning. Yet he says, "When the commandment came." Again Paul is speaking relatively. He means that though the commandment was there it had never "come" to him, it had never "got" him. Let me give a very simple illustration of what that means. People sometimes come to a preacher at the end of a service and say, "You know, I had never noticed that verse before," or they may say, "You know, I have read that verse a thousand times and more, but I had never seen it." What they really mean is that that statement had never really "come" to them before. We have all had that experience as we read the Bible. You are reading a verse which you have read many, many times before, and which has said nothing to you; but suddenly it "hits" you, suddenly it seems to be illuminated, and to stand out. What has happened? Well, it has "come" to you. That is what the Apostle means by "When the commandment came." It was always there, as the Scripture was always there, but it did not "get" him, it did not "take hold of him," it did not really speak to him. It did not come, in other words, with power and conviction and understanding.

This is a most remarkable statement, and especially so as coming from the Apostle Paul. Not only was the Law of God always confronting him, but he, as a Pharisee, was a great expert in the Law. All his training had been directed to that end. He was teaching others about the Law; and he prided himself on his knowledge. But the truth was that he only had a knowledge of the "letter," and he never understood the "spirit." That is why he writes frequently about that distinction. Take, for instance, the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 3, where he contrasts the letter and the spirit; he says that the whole trouble with the Jews was that they only knew the letter of the Law, and not its spirit. That is another way of saying the Law had not "come" to them; it had not come with conviction, with enlightenment, with understanding. It was a bare dead letter, it had never "found" them, it had never really "spoken" to them, and

come in a spiritual and powerful manner.

That is the key to the parallelism in this statement. He says in effect, "Before the law came like that to me, this was the position." What was it? The first thing he tells us is that before the Law had really come to him, and "got" him, and "found" him in that new way, "sin was dead." What does that mean? Again I must say that this is a relative statement. The Apostle says that there was a time in his life and experience when sin was dead. There is only one explanation; what he is really saying is that sin was comparatively dead, that as far as his awareness was concerned it was dead. That is what he thought; that was his experience; that was his understanding of the situation at the time. Sin was "lying dormant," as someone translates it. He was not conscious of it; it was as if sin had been dead.

Something our Lord said on one occasion throws light on this: "A strong man armed keepeth his goods in peace" (Luke 11:21). Here we have a perfect description of mankind in sin and under the dominion of the devil. Notice the terms. The devil "keeps his goods in peace." Everything seems to be very quiet; the tyranny is so great that in a sense they are not aware of it; there is a peaceful atmosphere. That is simply due to man's lack of realization of what the position really is. When I was "without the law," says Paul, I was so dull and deluded that I thought sin was dead. Sin is never dead, sin has never been dead since the Fall of man; but, comparatively speaking, it appeared to be dead and lifeless.

A second illustration in modern terms will also help us to understand the matter. The Apostle has already told us that sin is a terrible power--so powerful that it can use even the Law of God as a fulcrum to bring to pass its own purposes. But Paul says that there was a time in his life and experience when he was not aware of that power. Let us think of it in terms of a powerful engine in a motor-car. The better, and the more powerful the engine, the more quietly it runs or "ticks over" when you are not moving forward. You can be sitting in your car with its very powerful engine going; it is running but you can scarcely hear a sound. It has great power, but you are not aware of it because it is so silent. But then you put your foot on the accelerator and you become aware of power. Sin is like that engine. It was just "ticking over" as it were. Paul was not aware that it was there and did not realize its tremendous power. Because it was not acting in a violent manner he thought nothing of it. As far as he was

concerned, sin was dead. The power was there, of course, but he was not aware of it--"Without the law sin was dead."

Now let us look at another part of Paul's relative statement. Not only does he say that at that time sin was dead, he says also, "I was alive." That is the other part of the double statement "For I was alive without the law once." Once more, of course, it is a relative statement. All who have read the first three chapters of this Epistle know that Paul has proved there beyond any doubt that none was alive, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," that "there is none righteous, no, not one," and that the Jews were as hopeless and as condemned and as spiritually dead as the Gentiles. Yet, here he is, saying "I was alive once." So he cannot mean it in an absolute sense; everything here is relative.

The statement Paul makes in the first three verses of the 2nd chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians proves this. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." But not only was that true of the Gentiles, it was equally true of the Jews. "Among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Yet here the Apostle is saying that there was a time when he was "alive once" apart from the Law.

Clearly, Paul means, that in the same way that he thought sin was dead as far as he was concerned, he also thought that he was alive. The moment he realized that sin was alive he died; but as long as he did not realize that sin was alive he thought that he himself was alive. It was all because he had not understood the Law. In that account he was not aware of the power of sin and of the truth about himself. He thought that sin was dead and that he was alive. He means that he felt well, he felt full of life, full of strength and of power. He patted himself on the back, he was self-satisfied, he was confident, he was congratulating himself on the wonderful way in which he was keeping the Law. He felt full of life and vigour and confidence and self-assurance and power; he was alive, thrilling with vitality. That is what he is saying.

The Apostle has said this same thing in other places in different words. For example, in the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, in a wonderful bit of autobiography, he says, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (verse 6). "Blameless!" He was alive; there was nothing wrong with him.

He was a wonderful specimen of a godly, religious man; he was full of rigour and of strength in a moral sense. he says exactly the same thing in the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, verse 14--"And I profited in the Jews" religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of "the traditions of my fathers." There was never a man who was more pleased with himself, more satisfied with himself, more full of life and power. He was indeed a typical Pharisee.

At the beginning of the 18th chapter of Luke's Gospel we meet with a similar statement in our Lord's parable of the Pharisee and the publican who went up to the temple to pray. No man could have been more full of the sort of life of which the Apostle is speaking than the Pharisee depicted there by our Lord. He starts by saying, "God, I thank thee." There is nothing to do but to thank God. He is such a fine fellow, he fasts twice in the week, and gives a tenth of his goods to the poor. He is not guilty of any sins. How he thanks God that he is not like that miserable wretch, that publican over there who is guilty of so many sins! He does not need to ask for anything, forgiveness or strength; and he did not ask for anything. Who that is brimming over with health and vigour and power asks for anything? The man is self-sufficient, autonomous, self-satisfied; so there is only one thing to do, and that is to thank God that he is as he is. He is alive--what a wonderful man, full of health and rigour and strength and power! Or take the case of the rich young ruler and his encounter with our Lord, and the Lord's handling of him. Our Lord said to him, "You know the commandments--do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness." The young man replied, "All these things have I kept from my youth up, what lack I yet?" (Matt. 19:20) He was "alive," he was aware of all that the Law required; and he had kept it all! There was no trouble, there was no difficulty; he was "alive."

The Apostle sums up the matter perfectly in the 3rd verse of the 10th chapter of this Epistle, where we have the last word about the whole contention of the Pharisees, and of Paul himself before his conversion: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." That was the trouble. They were establishing their own righteousness, and so they thought they were "alive" and that all was well; but they were not aware of the real meaning of righteousness in the sight of God and as revealed in the Law.

That, then, was Paul's position when he was "without the law" before the commandment came sin was dead, and he was alive. He was not aware of any real difficulty or problem, all seemed to be perfectly satisfactory: he was "blameless." But when the commandment "came," this whole question of coveting was instantly illuminated. Suddenly he was arrested and apprehended by the realization of the spiritual character of the Law, and all that it was saying. It was a complete reversal of outlook. Sin which was dead before, now sprang to life; he who was alive before, now became dead. "Sin revived," he says. He means that sin sprang to life again, it took on new life, it awoke to activity. In terms of our illustration of the powerful engine, it suddenly began to vibrate with power. The Law had put its foot on the accelerator!

This, at first sight, is a most surprising statement. We would have thought, naturally, that the effect of the coming of the Law would have been not to "revive" sin, but to slay it; and, indeed, in an ultimate sense, that is what it does. But in experience it does the exact opposite--and he is writing here in an experimental manner. In other words, what happens is that the Law brings out the real strength and reveals the real nature and character of sin. The Law irritates sin, disturbs it, and by its prohibitions it arouses it; as I say, it puts its foot on the accelerator. Or, to use a different illustration, the Apostle is not using the picture of the fulcrum now, but rather a picture of the way in which a resistance always brings out a power. If you want to exercise your muscles, the best way to do so is to start lifting weights. There is always a certain amount of power in a muscle. It may be so little that you say that the person is an utter weakling, and has no strength at all. But even if small, it is there; and if you want to develop it, you have but to start picking up weights and increasing them continually. The greater the resistance against which you are working, the more your muscles will develop. You can accomplish the same result by pushing against an object; most exercises are based on this principle. The way to bring out the power is to increase the resistance; the more the resistance, the more it calls out your reserves of power, the innate strength that is there in your muscles. Something analogous to that took place when the Law "came" to the Apostle. Without the "resistance" provided by the Law he was not aware of the strength of sin; without this prohibition, without this antagonist, he had never known the real power of sin within himself. When the Law came powerfully and told him that he must not covet what he could not rightfully

have, he suddenly felt an overwhelming desire for such things.

What the Apostle teaches here is fundamental to the whole biblical teaching concerning sin. Take another statement which is a very close parallel to this, and which helps to throw light on it. In John's Gospel chapter 15, verses 22 and 24, our Lord says, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin," and "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." Take it on its face value and our Lord seems to be saying, "If I had not come into the world these people would not have had sin." But we know that they were all sinners, all condemned, all "dead in trespasses and sins." He is actually saying exactly the same thing as Paul is saying here, namely, that the effect of His coming has been to expose the sins. Of course they were sinners before; but there was a sense in which they did not appear to be sinners; it was not obvious that they were so until He came. But the moment He began to speak, the moment He began to do works among them that no other man had ever done, or could do, then the malignity and the spite and the hatred and the malice that was latent in them became manifest and open.

Who would ever have understood the truth about the Pharisees if our Lord had not come and spoken to them? Look at them apart from Him. One would tend to say, "They are very good men, they are wonderfully moral." The Pharisee in our Lord's parable to which we have referred is not lying, he is speaking the truth. He did fast twice in the week, he did give a tenth of his goods to the poor. So looking at them apart from our Lord, you would have said, What noble, excellent men, what wonderful observers of the Law! It is only when you see their reaction to the Son of God that you really get to know the Pharisees. Look at their bitterness, their hatred; see their subtlety and their cleverness; watch them as they whisper together and conspire and weave a plot, and try to trip Him and to trap Him by putting their catch questions and their leading questions. What evil and sin there was inside the Pharisees! But we would never have known it if the Lord had not come and spoken to them. He drew it out, as it were, he convicted them of sin; it is their reaction to Him that shows what they really were. Once they came up against Him, all this suddenly came to light. You could now see it in their faces and in their whole demeanour and behaviour. It is a perfect illustration of what the



Apostle says in this statement we are examining. "When the commandment came," he says, "and found me, sin sprang up to life again within me."

But that in turn led to this other result "I died." This man who was so much alive now dies. It is, as I have said, the same sort of relative terminology; but it is important that we should be clear as to what exactly he means when he says that he "died" as the result of the coming of the law. He does not mean here, primarily, that he was aware of his condemnation. That is true, of course; he died in the sense that he saw that the Law condemned him before God; but that is not what he is emphasizing here. Here he is dealing with his case in a much more experimental and practical way. What he means is, that he was now the opposite of what he was when he was "alive." Clearly the parallelism demands that. So we interpret "I died" by "I was alive"; and it means that he died in the sense in which we read of certain characters in the Bible that when they heard certain things it had a terrifying effect upon them. Of Nabal, for example, we read that when he heard a certain statement he "became as one dead," even though he remained alive physically. We say "I was petrified," or "It almost killed me." That is what Paul means--"I became as a dead man."

In other words he realized his weakness, his helplessness, and his hopelessness. The man who was so sure of himself before, felt as if he was dead. There was nothing there, self-confidence had gone, self-satisfaction disappeared, self-reliance had utterly vanished.

A good way of putting this is to say that he means, "I became poor in spirit," as the first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount puts it (Matthew 5: 3). A man who is poor in spirit is a lifeless man. The man who is "alive" is a man who is full of spirit and of power and confidence. We say, "there is a great spirit in that man." But the true Christian becomes "poor in spirit"; he says, "Who am I and what can I do?" He is not only poor in spirit, he also mourns. He was not mourning before; he was boasting. But he is now mourning because of his sin; he is troubled and unhappy. He has now had such a view of the Law that he feels he can do nothing, he is exactly as if he were dead. He sees the holiness of God and the holiness of the Law; he also has a sight of the terrible evil that is within himself. He sees what it is doing to him, how it is breaking him down and defeating him; and so he begins to feel that he can do nothing

whatsoever, that he is weak and helpless, that he is poor and blind, that he has nothing at all. He sees that he is utterly without strength and without rigour and life and power.

That is what the Apostle means by saying that he "died." The moment this illumination came in as to the Law and its spiritual character and its prohibitions, especially of coveting, that is what happened. He began to experience the "terrible power of sin creating within him "all manner of covetousness," and it knocked him down. He realized that he was an utter weakling--he who had been boasting of himself as being superior to all his contemporaries and so superior to them in his knowledge of the Law. He now saw that he had nothing at all, and that his righteousness was nothing but "dung" and dross and refuse. He had been going about to establish his own righteousness, but when faced with the righteousness of God he found that he possessed nothing. That, he tells us, is what he realized about himself when the commandment really "came" to him and found him and laid him low. He could not move; in a spiritual and moral sense, he was lying helpless on his back, as he had done in a physical sense on the road to Damascus. He was absolutely without strength. We have already been given the key to the understanding of this expression in the 5th chapter, verse 6: "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."" To be "without strength" is to be like a dead man. There is no life, no rigour, no power; in fact nothing of value at all.

Here we come to the end of the Apostle's statement. What has he established, what has he proved? And what are our reactions?

Our conclusions fall into two groups. The first is the particular conclusion that is essential to the Apostle's argument here. It is, that he has established once more that the Law can never justify a man, still less sanctify him. That is what he set out to prove--that no man can ever be sanctified by the deeds of the Law, can ever sanctify himself by performing the deeds of the Law. Indeed he is concerned to prove more than that. Not only can we not be sanctified by the Law, there is only one hope of our ever being sanctified, and that is, we must be set free altogether from the Law, in the same way as a woman is freed from her husband who has died. While we are "under the law" it will simply produce more sin in us, and will reveal our deadness to us, our utter hopelessness. So our only hope of sanctification is to be set free from the

Law. Paul has proved it once more. The Law cannot deliver us; the Law kills us, it makes us as dead men, for the reasons he has been giving.

That is the conclusion germane to the particular argument the Apostle is deploying in this section of the Epistle. But we must draw some further general conclusions which will be of value to us in our daily life and living, which will be indeed of supreme value to us in determining and discovering whether we are Christians or not. The first is that our spiritual health, our spiritual condition--in other words, on the negative side, our sinfulness is never to be judged only in terms of actions but always in terms of our reactions to God's holiness and to God's Law. That, to me, is one of the fundamental postulates of the Christian faith. It should always be an essential preliminary in evangelism. A man's spiritual state and condition must not be determined in terms of actions only. To do so would mean that there is nothing wrong with the Pharisee, and that he does not need the gospel. He fasts twice in the week, he gives a tenth of his goods to the poor; he never committed adultery, and has never committed murder. He does not need forgiveness. That is why this type of good, moral man goes to an evangelistic meeting feeling that it has no message for him and that his duty is to pray for the conversion of the "sinners" in the meeting. He does not feel guilty because he thinks of sin and sinners in terms of particular actions. Our churches are as they are because they contain so many people of this type, people who do not know that they are sinners because they judge sin only in terms of particular actions.

The way to judge and to estimate sin in yourself is to note your reaction to the biblical teaching about God in His holiness, and God as Judge eternal. Or think of it in this way--What is your reaction to the true preaching of the Cross? The message of that Cross is that we are all so damned and lost that nothing but that death could save us. "What," says many a highly moral person, "do you mean to say that I am in the same position as the prostitute or the drunkard or the murderer?" "Precisely," says the message of the Cross, "you need salvation as much as they do." Hence "the offence of the Cross." In other words, What is your reaction to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it the reaction of the Pharisee? He annoyed the Pharisees by telling them that He had come into the world because they needed to be saved as much as all others, that they could only be saved by His dying for them. They, the great teachers, they who

were "alive," they who had "kept" the Law and had "done all these things from their youth up" needed to be saved! And they hated Him accordingly. That is how you measure sin.

I repeat that there is nothing more misleading than to estimate sinfulness or our spiritual condition in terms of actions only. Actions are so varied. Go back again to my illustration. If you are going to judge the power of a motor car only by the silence of the engine when it is not moving you would be altogether wrong. That is not the way to test it. The way to test it is to confront it with a mountain or a gradient of one in three; then you will discover something of the power of your engine. The measure of our sinfulness is the measure of our resistance to the holiness of God, and the Ten Commandments and the Moral Law, the Sermon on the Mount and to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way, and in no other, we begin to see the whole deceitful element in sin which we shall consider more clearly later.

#### **ROMANS 7:10,11**

**"And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." --**

In these words the Apostle Paul continues the tremendously important statement with regard to the character and the function and the purpose of the Law. As we have already seen, it is a subject which is in every way essential to a true understanding of the gospel; and not only before we become Christians, but equally so afterwards, for not only is there no justification by the Law, but also no sanctification by the Law.

In these verses 10 and 11, Paul sums up what he has been saying in detail in the previous verses where he has told us that he was "alive" and that sin was apparently dead until the Law "came," and how then sin revived and he "died." He does so by saying "that the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death."

Again, the terms used are to be carefully noted. Look first at the expression "I found." Paul does not mean that as the result of careful study and examination he reached a certain conclusion. It sounds as if he was saying that, but it is not so. What he is really saying is that "the

commandment, which was ordained to life, was found in my case to be unto death." That is a better way of translating it. In other words, the "finding" is not the result of his investigation; it was something he discovered as the result of the coming of the Law to him, and the consequences that followed.

Look next at the statement, "The commandment which was ordained to life." All careful students of Scripture must at once feel rather surprised at these words, for the Apostle has devoted the early chapters of this Epistle to proving that there is no such thing as finding "life" by the Law. For instance, he summed up his great argument in the 20th verse of chapter 3 by saying, "Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." That means that no one can ever find life by the Law, that the whole tragedy and fallacy of the Jews was that they were seeking life by the Law. Yet here he seems to contradict himself completely by saying that the commandment "was ordained to life."

How do we face this problem? Let us first look at it in a very general way in the whole context of scriptural interpretation. We start by saying that obviously it cannot have its face meaning and value, otherwise it involves the Apostle in a blank contradiction of himself. Not only so, if it meant that, he would be undermining everything that he has been saying and establishing. So we cannot possibly read the words superficially. There we have a good principle which can always be applied. If the apparent meaning, the first meaning that suggests itself to you, is in obvious contradiction to some plain teaching of the Scripture it cannot be the truth and therefore you will have to seek for another explanation.

What, then, do the words mean? Clearly this, not that the commandment was given in order that people through it might obtain life, but that if men and women had kept the commandment, then it would have led to "life." This is so for the reason that the commandment, as Paul is about to tell us, is "holy, and just, and good." The commandment, after all, is the most perfect indication of the way of holiness and of happiness that has ever been given. When He gave the "commandment," the Law, the Moral Law, God was outlining a way of life which would be well pleasing in His sight. It is the way of life, and that is what the Apostle says about it at this point. Here is God's Law which teaches us what the holy and the happy life really is, the life that is pleasing to God.

Let me show from other scriptures that that is the meaning. Take, for instance, what the Apostle says later in chapter 10, verse 5: "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law (in this way), That the man which doeth those things shall live by them." That means that when Moses gave the Law he said to the people in effect, "If you keep this law you will have life, eternal life." Yes, "if" you do! Or take Exodus, chapter 19, verse 5. When God spoke to Moses about the giving of the law to the people he said; "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my commandments, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." But we notice the "if" again. The promise is conditional. Or take it as it is expressed in the Book of Leviticus, chapter 18, verse 5: "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them." That is what Paul quotes in the 10th chapter of Romans, verse 5. Or read the same thing again in Deuteronomy 6:25; "And it shall be our righteousness," says Moses to the people, "if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us." But we have still higher authority for our interpretation, namely, our Lord Himself. In chapter 10 of the Gospel according to St. Luke there is an account of an interview between a certain lawyer and our Lord about how to inherit eternal life. Our Lord said to this man, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." And our Lord said to him, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." There it is clearly! "The commandment was ordained unto life." But you notice again that the promise is conditioned upon performance--"This do, and thou shalt live."

There are, however, other statements which deal still more directly with the meaning of this phrase. The Apostle says quite explicitly in Galatians 3:21: "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." That is enough in and of itself to show what the Apostle does not mean by this statement which we are examining.

What then is the truth about the Law? It is that the Law is the perfect expression of what it is necessary for a man to do if he is to obtain life in that way. But, as Paul will tell us again in chapter 8, verse 3: "What the

law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh"--that is the explanation!--"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

We need not stumble therefore over the particular phrase, "the law which was ordained unto life."

That brings us to the next statement. "The commandment which was ordained to life, was found in my case to lead unto death." We need not stay with this. In a sense we have already been dealing with it. It is just another way of saying that this is what happened when the commandment had really "come" to him"-- "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." In other words, the Apostle says that the Law, far from giving life and happiness and holiness and joy, did the opposite. It condemned him, it showed him his failure, it inflamed sin within him, and therefore revealed to him his utter helplessness, and left him in a state of complete misery.

But why did it happen in the Apostle's case, that the Law which was ordained unto life was found to be unto death? The answer is--as he has been telling us already, and as he will tell us further in the next verse--that it was all because of sin, and because of what sin does with the Law, and did with the Law in his case, as in the case of the Pharisees and the Jews. We can sum it up by pointing to what he will say later in chapter 9, verses 31 and 32: "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone." The trouble, the "stumbling stone," was that they did not make the right use of the Law. Sin so affected them that, though this Law of God had been given to them, they made the wrong use of it; they used it as a "way of righteousness."

In his First Epistle to Timothy, chapter 1, verse 8, the Apostle makes a very illuminating statement which throws light on what he is saying here. "We know," he says, "that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." The Law is good on condition that you use it in the right way. The fact is, however, that because of sin we do not use it lawfully. And that is why he found in his case, as he says, that the commandment which was ordained unto life he found to be unto death.

The Apostle is virtually saying here what he says in 1 Corinthians 15:56: "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." "The sting of death," the thing that really kills in death, is sin. Sin makes death what it is, and that which puts power into the sting is the Law. We have already been considering some of the ways in which sin does just that. We saw how it increases lust and passion--concupiscence and how it inflames the passions; and how, in addition, it leads to failure and misery and condemnation. So the Apostle will be fully justified when he comes to verse 2 in chapter 8, and sums up all that he has been saying in chapter 7 in the words: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free." From what? From that law which he now describes as "the law of sin and death." The commandment which was ordained unto life, had become a commandment, a law "of sin and death." It aggravates sin and therefore leads to death still more certainly. There he actually refers to this Law of God as "a law of sin and death," because that is exactly what it is to the whole of the human race as the result of sin.

We now turn to verse 11 which is an explanation of verse 10. How careful Paul is in his method! "For"--He throws out his statement first in a general way--"the commandment which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death." But how? "For" here is the answer--"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." Why does the Apostle continue to repeat his explanations? Why does he keep on saying the same thing in different ways? I can but repeat my previous answer, namely, that the biblical doctrine of sin is absolutely crucial to an understanding of the biblical doctrine of salvation. Whatever we may think, we cannot be right and clear about the way of salvation unless we are right and clear about sin. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Apostle is so much concerned about this foundation principle. Looking back across his own life he sees that the whole explanation of his condition was that he had been for so long in a state of blindness and ignorance about the Law and sin, and therefore about himself. And he knew that that appeared to be the case with some of those to whom he was writing, he knew that it was still the case with all the Jews. So he is much concerned to make this very clear.

So he says it once more--"For sin . . ." Sin is the trouble. He has already been showing something of what sin does. "But sin," he said in verse 8, "taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of



concupiscence." Here he says, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me." They are both statements as to what sin does in this terrible way. But it is not mere repetition; there is, as we shall see, an addition to the thought also.

Let me again emphasize the importance of the Apostle's repetition. This is still one of the greatest causes of trouble with regard to salvation. There are many outside the Kingdom of God solely for this reason, that they have never understood the meaning of the Law, and what sin does with the Law. It is one of the commonest stumbling-blocks still, standing between people and salvation.

There is only one explanation of the moral state of society, it is this terrible power which the Bible calls "sin." Men in their cleverness and sophistication no longer believe in sin. They have been trying to explain it away in terms of psychology, saying that it is non-existent.

But now the Apostle adds something further. In verse 8 he told us that sin "wrought" in him. There, as we saw, he was emphasizing the "power" of sin. We have dwelt on that because it is, next to God, the greatest power in the universe. But here he is emphasizing another element in sin, its "deceitfulness." "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me." This translation is not quite strong enough. The Apostle used a very emphatic word here. He said, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, completely deceived me." It "took me in" completely. Not in a slight way, it took me in altogether, it deceived me absolutely. Such is the meaning of the word used by the Apostle. We must therefore realize that sin is not only terribly powerful, but at the same time terribly deceiving. How can anyone fail to see this? The Bible is full of this teaching.

Let me emphasize this point by some further quotations. I am taking no risks because people are so much influenced by what they read, and by the popular psychology. Even Christian people do not seem to believe the biblical doctrine concerning sin any longer. But not to believe it is ultimately to deny the whole Bible.

I start with Genesis 3:13; "And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." The first verse in that chapter has already said, "The serpent was more subtle than all the beasts of the field." The Apostle

Paul in chapter 11, verse 3, of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, takes it up and says: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Again he says in chapter 4, verse 22 of his Epistle to the Ephesians; "I exhort you that you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt through the deceitful lusts." In chapter 3, verse 13 of the Epistle to the Hebrews we have: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

These various scriptural quotations emphasize what the Apostle says here in chapter 7 of Romans, that sin is not only powerful but subtle and deceitful, that it deludes us, beguiles us, and misleads us. It is because this is true of sin that all of us sin. It explains why there is so much sin in the world, and why sin continues in the world. Sin continues in spite of the knowledge that we have with regard to its effects and results. Men can read books which show and prove the evil effects of alcohol, yet they go on drinking it. People can read books which show the evil effects of certain acts of immorality and uncleanness, yet men and women still go on doing these things. They have the knowledge, but they still go on in the practice of sin. Sin continues in spite of our experience of remorse and sorrow and pain and suffering after we have committed it. We still continue sinning, though the whole record of history and of biography is there staring us in the face showing us the consequences of sin.

In spite of it all sin continues, and sin abounds; and all because it is its nature to deceive us. "Sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me." How did it do so? How does it still do so? How does sin use the Law of God to deceive us? How is it that "the strength of sin is the law?" I would classify the answers in the following way. First, sin deceives us into mis-using the Law. I take my statement from Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy (1:8): "The law is good, if a man use it lawfully." Ah yes, but sin comes in and it makes us use it unlawfully.

It persuades us to believe that if we have not performed an actual evil deed we remain free from sin. Nothing matters except a man's actions. As long as I am not committing those actions I am keeping the Law, and I am therefore justifying myself in the sight of God. "Sin deceived me," says Paul, and it did so in that way. Paul was quite convinced, as we have seen in the Epistle to the Philippians, and in other Epistles, that he

was really keeping the Law, and that "touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless." He thought he was doing really well, he was "alive without the law once." Sin had deceived him by taking the commandment and saying, "Ah yes, the commandment means that as long as you do certain things and refrain from others you will be right with God." And he believed the deceit and acted accordingly. Not a word about coveting, of course! And so sin deceived him into misusing the Law.

But sin also works in another way. When we fall into sin, and our consciences begin to speak strongly and to remind us of the Law and its dictates, then sin changes its tactics completely. It now comes to us and says, "Yes, that is right; you have sinned, you have failed; remember that the "law of God is holy and just and good" and you have now broken it. You are in a completely hopeless position." Then the next step is that we say to ourselves, "Because I have failed and am hopeless there is no point in trying any further. Having sinned once I might as well sin again. I will be no worse, for I am already hopeless." So we sin the second, and the third, and the tenth, and the thousandth time. That is how sin comes to us. Having depressed us, it persuades us that what we do no longer matters. That is a further misuse of the Law.

Another method used by sin--and this is one of the most terrible of all--is "antinomianism." I have made mention of it previously. It works in this way. We have sinned and we are conscious of having broken the law. Then sin, coming as "an angel of light," says, "You have sinned and have broken the law, but don't be troubled. Realize that "where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded." You have nothing to worry about at all. The more you are conscious of your sin, the more grace increases, and in a sense, the more you sin the more grace operates in your case. You are a saved man, you are "under grace," so what you do no longer matters." Antinomianism is one of the most blinding curses that has ever afflicted the life of the Church. It troubled the early Church, and it has continued to do so ever since. Men, taking the letter of the doctrine of justification, and the "letter of the law" twist them to say that our actions no longer matter because we are now under grace; we can continue in sin because we are no longer "under the law" but "under grace." Thus the deceitfulness of sin makes us misuse and mishandle the Law.

Sin also deceives us by creating within us an antagonism to the Law; it

makes us feel that God is against us. That is what the devil did with Eve. "Hath God said?" "Yes, He is against you." The moment the Law begins to speak, sin always comes in at that point and says, "Yes, that is exactly what it does say, and that is because God is what He is--He is against you, a stern, feelingless Lawgiver."

But sin does not stop at that. It also makes us feel that the Law is unreasonable in its demands upon us, that it is unjust. The Law is made to appear narrow and cramped, prohibiting everything you like, and urging upon us things we do not like. The Law of God, says sin, is unjust, is impossible, is unfair; it asks of us something that no man can ever do. So sin persuades us to hate it; and because of our bitterness and hatred against it, when it tells us not to do something it creates within us the desire to do it.

Another manifestation of the subtlety of sin is the way in which it deceives us about ourselves. In a very subtle way sin comes to us and fawns upon us and praises us; it makes us think very highly of ourselves. It asks why we should be held down under the Law? As the devil put it to Eve, "Has God said you are not to eat of that fruit?" In other words, "Why did He set that limit? Why should you be deprived of what is desirable? Why should there be a limit to what you may do? It is an insult to your human nature. You were meant for freedom; God is against you. Assert yourself, live your own life; you are able to look after yourself and to govern your own life." The devil still does that, and persuades us of our right to freedom and self-determination. He convinces man that he is autonomous, able to govern himself and his world, and does not need anything outside himself. O the subtle deceitfulness of it all!

Another expression of this subtlety is particularly common at the present time. The Law comes to us and prohibits certain things. "Yes," says the devil, "and that is where, again, it is obviously against you; because it is telling you not to use the powers and faculties that you have within you. You have certain instincts, you have certain impulses and drives within you. Obviously they are there for some good purpose, they are good in and of themselves. So why do you not use them?" That is the popular teaching today. We are told that we should never have a feeling of guilt; that that is Victorianism and Biblicism, the Old Testament. We must never talk about sin, and never have a feeling of guilt because that violates our personality. One of the most popular manifestations of the modern mind

is the cult of "self-expression" which says, Let your instincts govern you, do what you feel like doing; give full expression to your innate powers. They are never to be repressed. That leads to unhealthiness and unhappiness. Many psychiatrists in treating their patients actually encourage them to do things which are prohibited in the Bible. They tell them that their trouble is due to the fact they have repressed their personality as the result of accepting the biblical doctrine of sin. Sin in its subtlety thus deceives people by praising them, and by getting them to express themselves and their evil.

Finally, sin deceives us about itself. It does so by making sin very attractive. We read that Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes" and she believed that it would make her wise if she took of it (Gen. 3:6). How extraordinary it was that God should prohibit the eating of such pleasant, perfectly formed fruit, with its beautiful colour and all else. No doubt the taste would be equally wonderful. The finest fruit in the Garden; and yet God prohibits it! "Sin deceived me," says Paul, and it still deceives by making sin very attractive. The Christian life is made to look very drab; but how wonderful the world looks. Look at the lights of London and of Paris and New York. Look at the smiling, laughing throngs, the beautiful dresses, the bright eyes. Of course you must not ask how all that is produced and to what it leads. You must not talk about the drugs or the alcohol such people have been taking, and all the heart-break after they go home or the next day. No, no! But look at it; does it not seem wonderful? A man comes up from the country, and seeing life in London he says, "Why, I haven't been living, this is life, it is marvellous. How attractive, how beautiful, how pleasant to look upon, how good it must be!" He reads thrilling reports of it in the newspapers and hears people praising it and talking about it and recommending it. All are saying, "This is real life; This is what the great and the famous and the illustrious people really do. How wonderful!" It all appears so attractive, so seductive, so interesting, so big, so noble, so free, by contrast with the godly, biblical, Christian life.

It deceives us further by discouraging any thoughts about consequences; it ridicules them. Do you remember what the devil said to Eve? "Did God say that if you eat of this fruit you will certainly die?" Then he said, "You will not surely die." Note the dogmatism. Yet they did die. But the devil with the utmost dogmatism and assurance said, "You will not surely die."

And Peter reminds us in his Second Epistle that the godless are always saying the same thing. "Where is the promise of His coming?" You preachers are threatening retribution and punishment and disaster; but you have been doing it for centuries, and yet the world stands as it has always stood. "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:1-11).

Sin deceives us about results and ends; it assures us that nothing unpleasant is going to happen. It hates all punishment, it hates the very idea of retribution. The popular and prevailing teaching today says that you must never punish, that the purpose of prisons is solely to reform and rehabilitate. That is what leads to the present chaos in prison life, indeed in the whole of life. This is part of the seduction of sin, the deceivableness of sin which discourages any idea of justice and righteousness and of punishment; and, of course, supremely, any idea about hell.

Hell is just unthinkable to the modern mind. No intelligent person ever talks about hell, we are told; no decent person talks about hell. It is ridiculed and dismissed as being totally incompatible with a God of love. That is how sin speaks. Sin, as an angel of light, talks much about the love of God. It will talk about anything in order to get you to close your eyes to the consequences of your actions, and the end to which they lead, and especially to the death, the eternal death, in which they are going to issue.

To see the deceivableness and the deceitfulness of sin at its very zenith, listen to what it says about the Cross of Christ on Calvary's hill. Alas! how often is false doctrine heard in so-called Christian pulpits! Preachers say, "What is the meaning of that death, that Cross? It is nothing but a great exhibition, a tableau, of the love of God. Do not talk about the righteousness and the justice of God. Do not talk about the wrath of God, do not talk about propitiation. It is all love; there is no punishment. God is a God of love; so live as you like; all will go to heaven at the end." That is how sin talks in its deceivableness and deceitfulness. Universalism! All are going to be saved; there is no division of mankind into the "saved" and the "lost." That is how sin deceives us by giving us one side of the picture only.

Sin does this work, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:17, by "darkening our understanding." It prevents our thinking clearly, it misrepresents

everything; it gives us rose-tinted spectacles; it perverts everything, changes everything, transforms everything. Even the devil, as Paul says, can transform himself into a veritable "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). So sin deceived Paul, made use of the Law to deceive him, and by it knocked him down, killed him, took the life out of him, made him to see he was utterly hopeless and doomed and damned. Sin always does that. As James says in the 1st chapter of his Epistle in verse 15, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

"The commandment, which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it (the Law of God) slew me."

### **ROMANS 7:12,13.**

**"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.**

**"Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." --**

The Apostle here is obviously summing up, and bringing to a conclusion, the argument he has been developing in the previous verses. In a sense he has been stating, so far, what he had found in experience. His real purpose is to deal with the question put in verse 7: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" He has to make clear that what he had previously said, especially in verse 5, does not mean that "the law is sin." It might look like that, he says, at first sight; but the moment you examine the situation it is clear that the trouble is not in the Law but in sin, and the use that sin has made even of the Law of God. He had ended by saying that what sin really does is to take advantage of the commandment, and to use it as a base of operations, and so it had deceived him, and as a result it "slew" him.

Thus he has stated what he has discovered in his experience. That is the statement of verse 10. "The commandment, which was ordained to life, was found by me to be, or, was found in my case to be, unto death." That was his preliminary summing up, as it were. Verse 11 explains how that

had happened, especially emphasizing the element of deceit. And now he brings it all to a head and says, "Wherefore"--in the light of all I have been saying "the law itself is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." In other words, he is saying, "This charge should never be proffered against me, that I am teaching that the Law is evil, that the Law is sin, because everything I have been saying really asserts the exact opposite." What he really believes about the Law is that it is "holy," and the commandment "holy, and just, and good."

Notice that he refers to the "law" and the "commandment." There has been much discussion as to why he does this. I find myself in agreement with those who say that he uses the variation in order to emphasize his point. He is really speaking about the whole law. "The commandment" may well mean the Tenth Commandment in particular--the commandment which says "Thou shalt not covet"--but it is equally true, of course, of all the other commandments. So in effect he is saying that "the law," and indeed every part of it, every individual detailed commandment, "the law," general and particular, is "holy, and just, and good." The Apostle was obviously very much concerned to say this and to make it abundantly clear. After all, he was a Jew; and he had been brought up as a Pharisee. He had spent the whole of his life as a Pharisee in studying the Law. Not only that, he has a great burden in his heart, as he tells us in chapter 9, for his fellow-countrymen. The last thing he wants to do is to offend them, or to have any misunderstanding whatsoever with regard to his view of the Law. The Law is the Law of God, and therefore it is important that he should make perfectly clear what he really does think about it.

Now let us look at his terms.

1. He says, "the law is holy." To be "holy" means that it is the absolute antithesis of sin and evil. The charge brought against him is that he is saying that "the law is sin." So he says, "Far from saying that the law is sin, I am saying the exact opposite, that it is holy." Holiness means separation, and especially from sin and evil. So when he says that "the law is holy" he is using the strongest term possible to show that it is as far removed as is conceivable from sin or evil.

Or look at the matter in the following way. "The law is holy." Of course it must be, it cannot help being so, for it is an expression of God's



character. It is the function of the Law to give us a revelation of God, and His being and His character, in order that we may learn what we have to be, and to become, in order to have communion and fellowship with Him. Now the fundamental statement which the Bible makes everywhere about God is that "God is holy." So the commandment, the whole of the Law, can be summed up, in a sense, in this way, "Be ye holy, for (because) I am holy." The Law is a kind of transcript of the character of God; it is a perfect expression of His will. The Law, therefore, is holy in the sense that it not only reveals to us the character of God, and what our character should therefore be, but it also holds us to that revelation. That, then, is Paul's first term, a most important term for us to remember.

2. Then, in the second place, Paul says that the Law is also "just." Here, again, is something to which we should pay the most diligent attention, because, as we have seen in our detailed examination of this section, sin in its deceitfulness is always trying to persuade us that the demands of the Law are unjust, unfair, and indeed impossible. As we have seen, that is one of the ways in which the deceitfulness of sin manifests itself. So Paul is concerned to emphasize that he had never said that the Law was unjust. His teaching is that the Law itself is absolutely just. It is just and right in what it demands of us; it makes no unfair demands of us whatsoever. There is nothing unfair to man in the Ten Commandments. It is all just, it is all perfectly fair. So the specious argument that was being brought forward cannot stand examination for a moment. The Law of God in all its demands is essentially righteous and absolutely just. Not only so; it is just in another sense. It is perfectly just, and justified, in the pronouncement and the sentence that it passes upon all sin or transgression, and on all failure to honour its requirements and to keep them. No man at the bar of final judgment will be able to say that any unjust demand was made of him, or that the Law is in any way unjust in punishing him. The Law has been given, and is plain and clear; it has told us what will happen if we do not obey it. So if we do not obey we must not grumble and complain when the Law exacts its penalty.

This is well illustrated in the case of Adam and Eve. They were given a law, and they were told exactly what would happen to them if they broke it. Then when they did break it, and sinned and rebelled against God, they had no right to complain when they were driven out of the Garden; for they had been warned that sin would have sad consequences. So the

Law is perfectly just when it exacts its penalty. It is neither an excessive penalty, nor an unjust penalty; it is strictly just and righteous.

3. That bring us to the third term, "the commandment is good"--it is just, it is holy, it is "good." Its "goodness" extends to all its purposes, all its objects, indeed to all its effects. The Law is good for men, because amongst other things, as the Apostle has been arguing, it shows us what sin is. It not only does that, it shows us what we ought to be, how we ought to live, how we ought to conduct and comport ourselves. All that is very good for us. Indeed it is by the Law of God, supremely, that a man can learn what is good for him, what is best for him. There is no better life than a life lived in conformity with God's Law. Anyone who lived such a life would be living the best conceivable type of life. Our Lord lived such a life. We find very often in the Psalms that the Psalmist praises the Law of God; he says that he knows more than his teachers because of God's Law; it is by means of God's Law that he has understanding and insight; it is by knowing and learning about, and attempting to keep God's Law that he has had the greatest happiness and the greatest joy in his life. The 119th Psalm is, in a sense, devoted to that one theme the goodness of the Law of God in and of itself. So the Apostle is justified in saying that the Law, and each individual commandment, is thoroughly good. Nothing can be better for us than the keeping of the Law. So the Apostle must never be charged with teaching that "the law is sin." His view of the Law is, he says, that it is "holy, and just, and good," it is perfect. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul," as Psalm 19 tells us.

But still Paul has not quite finished with the problem. There is a subsidiary problem. "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" Notice how relentless man is in his opposition to God, and His Law, and His ways. We often meet this when handling people's difficulties. You appear to have answered the question fully and satisfactorily; but then they say, "Yes, but" there is still something troubling them. The fertility of the human mind and imagination in creating difficulties is almost endless; it is quite astonishing. But the Apostle is patient, and is ready to take the difficulties one by one. "Was then that which is good"--"You have just been saying that the law is holy, and just, and good; do you mean to say, therefore, that that which is good was made death unto me?" The question arises in this way. He has been emphasizing that the law killed him. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And again

in verse 11, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." The law had killed him. The objector then sees a difficulty--"Very well, I will agree that you have established beyond any doubt at all that the Law is not sin. But you have just said another thing which creates great difficulty in my mind. You say now that the Law killed you; are you saying, then, that that which is "holy, and just, and good" has killed you? How can that which is good kill you?" That is the further question which the Apostle takes up in the 13th verse.

In our general analysis of this section of this chapter we stated that this 13th verse is somewhat difficult to place. The question is, Does it belong to the section running from verse 7 to verse 12, or does it belong to the section that follows? Is it the introduction to the following section? There is a good deal to be said for both these views. It does not really matter ultimately from the standpoint of truth, but if you have an orderly mind you cannot help being interested in the problem. What would perhaps incline me to say that it belongs to the next section is the particular way in which Paul expresses himself. He began a section at verse 7 by saying, "What shall we say then?" That is his usual way of introducing a new section. Then he puts his question, "Is the law sin?" And he answers, "God forbid." He had adopted the same method at the beginning of chapter 6, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." And again he did it at verse 15 in chapter 6, "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." He seems to be doing the same here again, "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid!" In many ways therefore he does seem to be introducing a new section.

At the same time it is clearly a continuation of what Paul has just been saying. The difficulty is occasioned by his saying that the Law is good but at the same time saying that it was made death to him. The solution seems to be to describe it as a transition verse which belongs partly to both sections. When we come to the next section I shall show that the whole of it, in a sense, is but an elaboration and an explanation of the theme of this section which we are now finishing. So this verse has a hook which connects it to the previous verse and also a hook linking it to what follows.

The question is: Granted that the Law is holy, and just, and good, nevertheless it does seem to have been the cause of the spiritual death

to which the Apostle is giving such emphasis. Therefore the question follows, "Is the Law then the cause of that death?" The answer is given immediately, "God forbid!"--let it not even be mentioned, it is unthinkable. What then is the explanation of what he has been saying? Paul explains his answer in a most extraordinary statement which is also difficult for one reason only, namely, that he left out the verb. This Apostle does that kind of thing from time to time--he was not a pedant, thank God. He often breaks the rules of grammar; and here he has actually left out the verb, which must be supplied in order to get at his meaning! What he is really, saying is this: "It is not the Law that killed me, but sin. God forbid that anyone should say that I am teaching that the Law was death unto me. It was not; it was not the Law that killed me, it was sin that killed me." So we can translate it thus, "Sin is the cause"; or "Sin became death unto me"; or "Sin was allowed to produce, and to lead to, this result of death to me." That is patently the meaning of the statement, and it cannot carry any other meaning. The Apostle is saying that God in His infinite wisdom allowed sin to do this with the Law in order that certain results might follow. He has already said twice that "Sin, taking occasion by"--making use of, setting out from there as a military base of operations, acting as a fulcrum--had done this. Now he says that God allowed sin to do that with the Law.

Here we meet with a great problem, of course. Why did the holy God allow sin to do this with His Law, which is "holy, and just, and good?" The Apostle's answer is that this was allowed in order that sin might appear sin, which means, that sin might be "shown up for what it really is." The difficulty with sin is to recognize it for what it is. Sin is deceitful, sin is very clever, sin is like a fisherman who hides himself and conceals the bait. Sin has to be shown up in order that it might appear sin, that it might be "shown" to be sin. What Paul is saying, therefore, is that it is the Law that really brings that about. Sin was not quite as clever as it thought it was! That is what the Bible says everywhere about the devil and sin. The devil is very clever and very subtle, but not quite as clever as he thinks he is. When the devil brought about, through men, the crucifixion and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, he thought he was producing his final masterpiece; but ultimately that is what destroys him. The same is true of sin. Sin thought, cleverly, that it was going to use the Law, and it did so in the senses we have seen. But while it was doing so it was exposing itself.

That, he tells us, is the first reason why this was ever allowed to take place. It is in this way that sin, as sin, becomes clear and evident to us. Paul has already said this in an experimental sense earlier in the words, "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Also it was only when sin revived, when the Law came, that he was killed and realized the truth about himself and the truth about sin. That, then, is the first thing.

But there is here a second important statement about sin: "That sin, by means of the commandment (or through the commandment) might become exceeding sinful." It is only by the Law that the exceedingly sinful character of sin is demonstrated and brought out. In other words, the Apostle is concerned to show not only the power of sin, but the malignity of sin. This is the thing which we are so slow to learn; something of which all of us, by nature, know little if anything. It explains why, today, people object to this biblical doctrine of sin. They hate it; indeed, some clever, popular preachers ridicule it in terms of psychology. That is just the measure of their extreme, utter blindness. Nothing is so true of sin as its exceeding sinfulness, and nowhere do you see that exceeding sinfulness so clearly as just here -- that it can even manipulate and use this holy, just, good Law of God, and by means of it kill us! It can twist and pervert and turn into an instrument that is opposed to us even God's holy Law which is for our good. "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" No, it was not the Law itself, but sin which handled and abused it, sin which perverted it and used it deceitfully, that brought about that result. And by this deed we see sin's devilish character, its utter malignity, and its foulness. Nothing too strong can be said about it. It is all included in the expression "exceeding sinful." There is nothing worse to be said about sin than that.

This is clearly an important statement for us to grasp, not only because it shows us the exceeding sinful character and nature of sin, but because at the same time it instructs us with regard to the whole function and purpose of God's Law and the giving of the Law. That is, after all, the fundamental theme which the Apostle is handling.

Here I would interject a remark. The secret of expounding "Romans seven" is to avoid becoming lost in the details. There is no chapter in the Bible in which it is so easy to "miss the wood because of the trees" as in this 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. It is essential, therefore,

that we go on reminding ourselves as to the chapter's fundamental purpose, otherwise we shall become lost in the details. Its primary object, its fundamental theme is to deal with the place and the function of the Law in God's dealings with the human race. Every detail must be considered in the light of that purpose, and of nothing else. To start by thinking that the object of this chapter is that Paul should give us his experience is to miss the whole point. That is not his purpose at all. His fundamental object is to deal with the charge that the Jews and others were bringing against him by saying that his preaching meant that the Law of God was not only useless but actually evil, that it had no function or purpose at all, and that it would have been better if it had never been given. It was the charge that his preaching of justification by faith only, and by grace salvation by grace--was really throwing the Law right out and dismissing it entirely.

Here, in this crucial verse, Paul shows the real function and purpose of the Law. It is to show "the exceeding sinfulness of sin." Of course, the Apostle has really said it before, not in these exact terms, but he has made the same general point in chapter 3, verse 20. Summing up the great argument about justification he says there, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." It is the law that gives us an understanding of sin. It was never meant to justify a sinner. Here he is repeating that truth, but also saying something further.

There is a parallel statement in the Epistle to the Galatians, in chapter 3, and verse 19 in particular: "Wherefore then serveth the law?" Paul answers, "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." In other words, the Law was never intended to be a way of salvation. The fundamental error of the Jews was to think that it was so intended. That was exactly why they had gone so sadly astray. The Apostle says the same thing again in chapter 9 of this Epistle: "Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone" (verses 31 and 32). That was their whole trouble. They would persist in thinking that God had given His Law to them in order that they might save themselves through it. But salvation is a matter of grace entirely. God had stated that away back in the

Garden of Eden, and still more specifically, in the covenant He made with Abraham. In Galatians, chapter 3, Paul says that what governs salvation is the covenant of God made with Abraham and his seed, and he reminds us that that was looking forward to Christ. And he argues that the Law, which only came in four hundred and thirty years after the covenant with Abraham, cannot disannul or affect that fundamental original covenant. It was never meant to do so. Why then was it brought in at all? Ah, says Paul, it was brought in afterwards in order that people might see their need of the Covenant of grace; it was brought in because of "transgressions," till "the seed should come to whom the promise was made." So later he says that it was a kind of "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." It does not save; it brings us to the Savior. It is not the way of salvation; its purpose is to show us our need of salvation, and to give us some indication of how it is going to come.

Our understanding of this point is quite crucial. The Apostle is telling us that we must get rid once and for ever of the notion that the Law in any shape or form was meant to save us. The Law cannot justify us, the Law cannot sanctify us. And if you try to use it for either of these purposes you are attempting something which is impossible. Here the particular emphasis is upon the utter impossibility of ever being sanctified by the Law. Sin being what it is, in all its power and malignity, in all its subtlety and exceeding sinfulness,--render our sanctification by the law an utter impossibility. The Apostle has been working out this argument from verse 7 to the end of this verse 13. But he is so anxious that we should be clear about the matter that he does not even stop at verse 13. In verse 14 and to the end of the chapter he proceeds still further to prove just this one point--that a man can never become sanctified by the deeds of the Law or by any attempt to work out for himself the commandments and the dictates of the Law.

Here, then, we have arrived at a point of transition, but before we begin to look at verse 14 we must give thought to one other question. It has to be faced because the Apostle, in a sense, makes us face it. It is this. Of whom has the Apostle been speaking in the previous verses? I am not for the moment going to discuss the identity of the person about whom Paul is speaking from verse 14 to the end, but the identity of the person of whom he has been speaking from verse 7 to verse 13. "Nay," he says in verse 7, "I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust,

except the law had said..." "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." "The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death . . . and it slew me," and so on.

The question is, Of whom is the Apostle speaking?

1. There have been those who have said that the Apostle is not speaking of himself at all, but that he has been personifying in his own person the state and the condition of the Jews. They say that when he says "I was alive without the law once" he is describing the condition of the Hebrews before the Law was given by God through Moses to them. The commandment came when God gave the Ten Commandments and the Moral law. We need not stay with that, because there are very few, if any, today who still hold to this theory. If the Apostle meant that, why did he not say so? It would have been so much easier to say so. No, he is clearly and patently talking about himself and his own experience, because he puts it in terms of concupiscence. It is personal experience, something that happens to an individual.

2. But then there arises the question, What stage of his life, what stage in his human experience is the Apostle describing? Here again there are some who say that the Apostle is saying, "I was alive without the Law once. From my birth until about the age of twelve, of course, I knew nothing about these things at all; but then at the age of twelve, like every other Jewish boy, I began to be instructed about the law; and the moment I was given the teaching of the Law I began to understand about sin, and I saw that I was a sinner." So they say that Paul's first statement is about himself until he became an adolescent; and that afterwards he is describing his experience as an adolescent. But I would reject this again out of hand, and for this good reason, that the piece of autobiography the Apostle gives us in the 3rd chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians excludes it completely. There he says in verse 6, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." That was not when he was an infant, not when he was a boy, not until he became an adolescent, but right up to the time when he became a Christian. He was a typical Pharisee, and like all Pharisees he was very well pleased with himself. We have already interpreted verse 9, "I was alive without the law once," as meaning "I thought I was doing well, I was convinced I was keeping the Law." That was because he had



not understood about coveting, and had reduced the Law to a number of actions and particular sins. That was his condition as a Pharisee, and not merely until he reached the age of twelve. So we reject that interpretation.

3. Then there are those who would have us believe that Paul is referring here to his experience after his conversion. They say that no man can know what the Law really is until he is regenerated and converted. Paul says, "The commandment came, sin revived, I died." They teach that that came at conversion or subsequent to it. But, again, I would reject that for this reason, that the Apostle, surely, in this section is describing the condition of a man who is "under the law." Here is a man who is a victim of the Law, he is under the Law; everything he says describes a man in that condition.

4. But I have a yet more powerful argument. This section we have been looking at --verses 7 to 13 --is really an elaboration of verse 5, which reads, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." That is the primary statement, and all we have been looking at is an elaboration of it--"fruit unto death"--"slew me." Clearly he is describing a man "under the law." Sin takes advantage of the Law in order to kill him. He is describing a man who is "in the flesh"; and a man who is "in the flesh" is not a Christian. The Christian he describes in chapter 8, verse 9, thus: "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." So here we have a man who is "in the flesh," and what he is dealing with here is not something that has happened subsequent to conversion.

5. We are left with this conclusion, that the experience described must have been before the Apostle's conversion. In that case the question arises, At what stage before his conversion? He has told us that he is "in the flesh" still, and all the effects he describes are those which happen to a man "in the flesh"; but he also tells us that he now has a spiritual understanding of the Law. The commandment has really "come" to him with power; he sees its spiritual character; he has understood the meaning of "Thou shalt not covet."

We have therefore to put these things together. How can we do so? It

seems to me that there is only one adequate solution. Here is a man who is "under conviction of sin," but who has not yet understood the truth about salvation in Christ Jesus. He is deeply convicted of sin, he has been "slain," he is "dead," he realizes that he is not only guilty, but that he is helpless, and that he has sin within him; but as yet he does not understand anything further. The Apostle is describing something that was once true of himself; he is looking back. "I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." "Sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me..." He is not saying that it is still doing so; it did so then. It is all in the past. "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He is not still dying. He is looking back. It is all in the past. He is looking back across a past experience.

When did this happen? The Apostle does not tell us. Do you regret the absence of that fact? You should not do so. If it had been important for us to know exactly when this happened, he would have told us. As I keep on repeating, the Apostle is not primarily concerned here about his own experience or about himself; he is merely illustrating this tremendous point of his about the purpose and function of the Law. He is showing us the position of a man now awakened to the truth about the Law. And there he leaves it; he does not tell us any more about it. When was this? What I am going to say next is in a sense speculation; I am only putting ideas before you tentatively. There are different views, no one can establish any one of them. We cannot be certain because the Apostle has not chosen to tell us.

1. Did this happen to Paul before his experience on the road to Damascus? What exactly is the meaning of the phrase in Acts 9, verse 5, where our Lord, speaking to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, said, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," or "to struggle against the goad?" Of course, the answer still is that we do not know. But it is not impossible that this man, Saul of Tarsus, was already convicted of sin. "Ah but," you may say, "if so, why did he go to Damascus "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the Lord Jesus Christ and all his followers?" Men convicted of sin have often done that in their misery and unhappiness. His self-righteousness as a Pharisee would make him hate this Teacher more than all others. It is not incompatible at all with his being under conviction. This is an interesting point from the experimental

and practical standpoint. Take it as a word of encouragement. If you are concerned about some dear one whom you would like to see as a Christian, and for whom you are praying, remember that sometimes, just before they are converted, they become most violent against you and the Truth. It is an indication very often that something is going on. The violence is often a very good sign. Was it then the case that the Apostle was convicted of sin before he went on the journey to Damascus? I cannot exclude that possibility. But I am not saying that I believe it was actually so.

Take another possibility. Is Paul describing here what happened to him between the event on the road to Damascus and the coming of Ananias to him with the comfort of the gospel and the baptism of the Holy Ghost? Notice the very interesting things we are told in the narrative in Acts 9. Let me indicate those I regard as most important. In verse 6 we read, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." In other words, our Lord did not really give him the full comfort of salvation there, if He gave it [to] him at all. Here is Saul of Tarsus suddenly made to tremble and to be astonished. It was the sight of the Lord who was speaking to him, and the realization that it was Jesus that did this. At any rate, he came to realize there that he had made a most terrible blunder about this Person, and he knew now that He was the Son of God.

But then there is another statement of much interest in verse 9: "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." This is not an account of a man rejoicing in his salvation--"trembling and astonished," "amazed," "blinded" physically, and he did not eat nor drink for three days. Then we are told in verse 19, "And when he had received meat, he was strengthened." He had become very weak. A three days' fast does not make one as weak as the narrative indicates, but I can understand a terrible conviction of sin doing so. Here was a man who was an expert in the Law. Suddenly this light from heaven comes down upon him, showing him that he had been utterly wrong; so I suggest that in those three days he suddenly saw how completely mistaken he had been about the Law. He saw its spiritual character, he understood the meaning of coveting. All hell was let loose within him, and he saw his complete death, his wretched failure, his utter inability. But the coming of Ananias was clearly

and obviously a great help to him. "Brother Saul," said Ananias, "the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." And it was so. He not only regained his sight, he now desires to eat; he is able to eat, and is strengthened. For myself, I am content to believe that that period is sufficient to account for all we have been looking at in verses 7 to 13 of this 7th chapter of the Epistle.

3. There is only one other possibility -- though I would exclude it--and that is, that something of this went on during the three years that he was in Arabia. I cannot accept that, because I cannot conceive that a man baptised with the Holy Ghost could go through the experience which he describes in the verses we have been considering. To me, therefore, it seems probable that he is describing the period between the Damascus road experience and the coming of Ananias; but I would not exclude the possibility that something had been happening even earlier.

But that is not the main issue here. It is not the Apostle's fundamental concern. All he is saying is that there was a time in his life when he felt that he was "alive"--self-satisfied, self-righteous, self-confident--but that when he began to understand the spiritual character and nature and meaning of the Law, it killed him, "knocked the life out of him." He became as a dead man, completely hopeless, utterly and absolutely helpless. That is what he wants us to understand. When it happened really does not matter; but that it had happened is of extreme significance, as he will proceed to show us in the remaining verses of the chapter.

## **ROMANS 7:14**

**"For we know that the law is spiritual but I am carnal, sold under sin." --**

In this verse we come to the beginning of this most interesting section in this 7th chapter of this Epistle; indeed we come to what is beyond any doubt the most famous and best-known section in the entire Epistle. There is no section, certainly, which has so frequently led to debate and disputation and, unfortunately, one must add, even wrangling and a display of a spirit far removed from that which is taught in the New Testament. This is a subject, therefore, which we approach, I trust, with a great deal of caution, and certainly with a maximum of humility.

The dispute has always centred round the question as to who this man is whom the Apostle is describing in this section.

There have been three main views.

FIRST, there have been those who have said that the Apostle is here describing an unregenerate man, a man who is in the state of nature, not yet quickened and regenerated.

The SECOND view is that it is a description of a regenerate man, and not only a description of a regenerate man, but a description of a regenerate man always, even at his best; indeed, that the Apostle Paul was describing himself and his own experience at the very time he wrote these particular words.

The THIRD view maintains that it is an account of the regenerate man in his early stages, at the beginning of his Christian life, and before he has received a "second blessing," or "second experience," which takes him out of this state and puts him into the state of experience described in the 8th chapter. In other words they say that this is only a preliminary and temporary stage in the experience of the regenerate man.

The history of these three differing views is interesting, and it is well that we should know something about them, because, whatever else it may do, I trust it will produce in us the desired humility to which I referred. Anyone who approaches this section without "fear and trembling," and without humility, is not really fit to expound Scripture at all.

1. It is generally agreed that most of the Fathers of the Church, during the first three centuries, regarded these verses as being a description of the unregenerate man. That is just a fact of history. There were some exceptions, but speaking of them as a whole it is true to say that for the first three centuries the great doctors of the Church, the "Patristic Fathers" so-called, and others took this view, that this was an account of the unregenerate man. Then we come to the great figure whom we describe as Saint Augustine of Hippo, one of the greatest luminaries in the whole story of the Christian Church, who was active during the period 386-430 A.D. His story with regard to this section is particularly interesting. He began by regarding it, as those who had gone before him had done in general, as a description of the unregenerate man.

2. Augustine did so, and from teaching that Paul is describing here the unregenerate man, he then championed the exposition that it was clearly the regenerate man, and the regenerate man even at his best. So Augustine moved from the first position to the second.

The Protestant Reformers and the Puritans, and all who have followed them, have almost without exception followed that second exposition of Augustine; in other words, they have taught that this is a description of the regenerate man. They take the view that this is a description of the regenerate man: and the Reformed tradition of exposition has generally followed that course.

On the other hand, those who have followed the different theological system commonly called the Arminian, have generally taught that this is a description of the unregenerate man--the view that was taken by the Patristic Fathers.

3. But then, during the last hundred years, there have been others who, while belonging to the general evangelical tradition in the main tenor and exposition of Scripture, have taken the third view, that it is not a description of the full-fledged regenerate man, the regenerate man at his best as long as he lives in this world, but the ill-taught and incomplete regenerate man who has not yet advanced to the position described in the 8th chapter of this Epistle.

This very brief summary of the history of the interpretation reminds us that we must approach this matter with care, and above all, with great humility. Nothing is quite so bad and reprehensible as a party spirit.

Whatever party we belong to, or whatever views we may hold, a party spirit is always wrong. Our great concern should be the Truth. Of necessity, we all hold a particular point of view and adhere to some system of doctrine. We cannot avoid doing so. People who say that they do not hold to any particular system, and that they are "just biblical," are simply confessing that they have never really understood the teaching of the Bible. But though we may find ourselves, in general, following a certain line of exposition, a particular school of thought and of teaching, a particular view of dogmatic theology, we must never allow that to turn into a party spirit. Though this is true of us, we must come to every particular statement of the Scripture with an open mind; we must try to discover what the Scripture is saying, because no system is perfect, and at particular points even the best system may have certain defects. No system worked out by man ever has been, or ever will be perfect. Therefore, though we are governed in general by certain views, that does not mean that we must slavishly follow in every detail what has generally been taught by that particular school of thought. We must always be honest, we must seek earnestly for "the unction of the Holy Spirit," we must realize that no teachers in the Church have had a complete monopoly of Truth. We must realize that at certain points the best systems can be somewhat defective because they are human products. So we approach this section of Scripture with great humility, with great carefulness and concern, and yet without a prejudiced mind.

As we approach this problem we are confronted by two possible procedures.

1. One is for me to outline immediately the view I hold of this section, and then, as we come to the particular statements, to proceed to prove that this is the correct view.
2. But I have rejected that way of approach because I believe there is another method which is not only better in itself, but also more Scriptural. It is the method we have hitherto adopted and is as follows.

First, let us look at the particular statements as if we held no view with respect to the whole section; let us try to discover what each statement says, and then, having arrived at what seems to be the meaning of each particular part, let us gather all together and try to arrive at a conclusion.

That is undoubtedly the better method, the method to be followed in any

realm and department of thought. It is always right to listen to the evidence before you give a verdict. He is a very poor judge who starts with his verdict, and then proceeds to turn down everything that opposes it, instead of listening first to all the arguments, and giving them their full value. And any ordinary fair-minded man would follow the same procedure. As Christians, we should know the terrible danger of prejudice, and how it has so often led to rancour, wrangling, a bitter party spirit, and even cruelty and war, in the long history of the Church. It behoves us, therefore, more than anyone to adopt this second method. So we shall proceed to take this passage in the way in which we have approached so many other passages of Scripture.

We shall adopt the inductive method and work up to a conclusion.

We start then with a general analysis of the section, following the exact order of the verses:

In verse 14 the Apostle makes a general statement about the position and the condition of the man described--whoever or whatever he may be. "We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin."

Verse 15 describes that position and condition as shown in practice and in daily life. "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." These words tell us how the man described in verse 14 behaves.

Verses 16 and 17 contain two inferences or deductions that can be drawn about this man and his conduct.

The first, "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good." That is a fair deduction.

But there is a second deduction.

"Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

Verses 18-20 read: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Here we have a fuller exposition and explanation of what has been said in verse 17 about this man. That



is typical of the Apostle's method, as we have often seen.

Verse 21: Here we have another general statement, but at a somewhat deeper level. In effect Paul is almost taking up again the statement of verse 14; but in the light of what he has just been saying, he adds to it. "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." It is, I repeat, another general statement about this man.

Verses 22 and 23 expound what has just been said in verse 21. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Verse 24: Here is the cry of despair, and at the same time, the cry for deliverance that results from the realization that he is in the terrible position which he has been describing.

Verse 25: This begins with an ejaculation of relief. I deliberately describe it in this way for reasons that will emerge later. The verse closes with a brief summing up of the statement he has been making about this man in the entire section.

Let us now take a somewhat closer view of the argument. What is the main thrust of the section? What is the Apostle really concerned to do here? We start with the word "For," with which verse 14 opens.

Never has this word been more important than at this point; because it tells us that Paul is not introducing an entirely new section here, not starting upon a new subject; he is continuing with the previous one. This section is an elaboration and a further and a deeper exposition of what he has already been saying. The next term settles that once and for ever. "For," he says, "we know." What do we know? "That the law is spiritual." In other words, from verse 14 and onwards the Apostle is still dealing with the Law and its functions, as has been the case from the 1st verse of this chapter. That is still the theme; he has not finished with the Law, he has not finished with his exposition with regard to the Law and its function.

I am suggesting, therefore, that from this 14th verse to the end of the chapter Paul is still dealing with the same major theme that has occupied him from the beginning of the chapter. He is answering the charge brought against him with respect to his teaching concerning the Law.

And we have seen that there were two main charges brought against his teaching, and two subsidiary charges.

The general charge was that he was dismissing the law altogether, and saying that the law was of no value at all. That charge he answers in the first six verses.

But in doing so he seems to be saying two things about the Law to which certain people objected.

The first is conveyed in verse 7. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" That arises because in verse 5 he seemed to say that the law was sin-- "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law (energized by the law), did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." And we have seen that from verse 7 to verse 12 Paul has been dealing with that charge and proving that the Law is not sin; it is sin itself that has so abused and twisted and misused the Law that it has produced, and led to, sin.

But a second objector asks in verse 13, "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" And Paul answers immediately, "God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." But he was not satisfied with that. This is always his method. In verse 7, having raised the question, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" he replies, "God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law." Then he proceeds to expound that in the following verses. He does precisely the same here. He asks the question, "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" and answers immediately in the remainder of verse 13. But he does not stop at that; he goes on to expound it: and that is what we have in verses 14 to the end of the chapter.

Or we can put it positively and say that Paul is concerned here to show his actual view of the Law, to show what the Law is in and of itself, what it was meant to do, and especially what it was not meant to do. The Law is God's Law; it is "holy, and just, and good"; it was meant to do certain things, but equally clearly it was not meant to do certain other things, and it cannot do them.

That is why we have to become "dead to the law" before those things can happen. I suggest that he is still concerned with that theme; and that his

fundamental object in particular is to show what the Law could not do. In other words, the Apostle in this section is not primarily concerned to "give his experience"; he has not set out just to tell us something about himself. He is telling us and setting out before us his view of the Law--the nature of the Law, what it is meant to do, and what it is not meant to do, or the limits to the Law. In other words in this section he is, in particular, refuting the charge that he had taught in verse 5 that the Law is death or produces death. But at the same time he is showing how the Law, because of sin, becomes a minister of death. He had already shown this with respect to the charge that the Law is sin. He says that the Law is not sin, but because of the character of sin in man the Law aggravates sin, "produces it," and so brings out the "exceeding sinfulness of sin."

That is my suggestion as to the meaning and purpose of this section. May I offer a little proof of this at this point, before we proceed any further. Look at what the Apostle says in verses 2 and 3 of the next chapter. Verse 2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Here we find the same two thoughts again. The Law, because of sin in man, has become "a law of sin," a law that aggravates sin. It has also become a Law that produces "death," or leads to death--again because of sin. So he now calls it "the law of sin and death." That is the same Law of which he has been speaking since the beginning of chapter 7. He has proved that in terms of the relationship between husband and wife. Having said all he has said about it in chapter 7, in chapter 8, verse 2, he sums it up as "the law of sin and death." Then to make his point doubly sure he says in verses 3 and 4, "For what the law could not do" that is what he is concerned about--"what the law could not do because it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (in order) that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." In other words I suggest that in chapter 8, verses 2, 3 and 4, he is summing up all that he has been saying in chapter 7. He seems to say, "Well now, there I have proved it to you; that is what I have been saying all along; that now "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" hath set us free altogether from the Law which had become to us a law of "sin and death."" Above all, I repeat, his original intention is to prove that the Law was never given either to justify or to sanctify us, that indeed it has become an actual hindrance in both respects, and we have to be set free

and delivered from it before we can be either justified or sanctified.

I suggest, then, that that is the theme of this section. It is about the Law, what it does do, what it does not do, what it cannot do. The Apostle is not primarily writing about himself or his experience, but about the Law and the truth about the Law.

There is one other general point which I must take up--the point that is so constantly made--that here the Apostle changes the tense in which he speaks.

Hitherto he has been talking about the past. He has said "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." He is talking about the past and we have agreed that he was talking about the past. But now, says someone, here he suddenly changes his tense and he says, "We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal"--not "I was carnal"--"sold under sin." And he goes on in the present tense, "For that which I do"--not that which I did--"that which I do I allow not: for that which I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." It is all, they say--and rightly--in the present tense. What do we say to this?

There are those who say that this settles the whole matter, and that when he says "I am" he means "I am," when he says "I do" he means "I do," and that clearly enough, he is describing his personal experience at the very time of writing.

But that does not follow for a moment, and of itself does not prove anything whatsoever. If there were such a proof there would never have been the great discussion I have described, and a man like Augustine would never have changed from one position to the other. That the matter of tense does not settle the question, and that the matter cannot be disposed of so simply, can be stated in the following way.

A form that is very often adopted in pleading a case, or in establishing a point, is to employ the method of speech known as the "dramatic present." This is done very often by preachers. I often use this method myself. I say to a man who puts a certain proposition to me, "Well now," if that is so, the position you leave me in is this." I am putting it in the

present--I do this, I say that. I am dramatizing the argument, saying, "Well now, this is the position in which you leave me"; and then I proceed to put it in terms of that position; "This is how I find myself if what you are saying is right." It is a very common way of establishing a point. So we are entitled to say that the Apostle here is putting this whole position in this personal and dramatic way in order to make it objective. He puts it in terms of a person and how that person finds himself, and what he finds in himself, in the light of this particular position.

In other words, all I am saying at the moment is that we must not be carried away by the notion that the mere change in the tense establishes the only possible interpretation of this particular section. And let me add that the great men who have taken the different points of view are on the whole ready to grant that what I have just been saying is a simple and well-known fact, namely, that this personalizing, this dramatic representation, is a form of expression frequently used in the Scriptures.

We can now begin to look at the statement of verse 14: "We know that the law is spiritual." There is no need to go over that again. He has already said that the Law is "holy, and just, and good"; and has repeated that it is "good." This is something that can now be taken for granted. "We know that the law is spiritual"; at least those to whom (to use Paul's own phrase) the Law "has come" know that. The moment it has "come" in that way a man knows that the Law is "spiritual." There is no need to debate the point. Once more he is not really saying anything new; he is just reminding us of what he has already said. It is a Law that has come from God, and hence it is holy, just, and good. God is Spirit, and therefore His Law is spiritual.

But there is also a second meaning, namely, that the Law is not merely a matter of "the letter." There is a clear exposition of this distinction in 2 Corinthians 3:6, where we find interesting contrast between the Law and the spirit. Paul says in verses 5 and 6, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." The Law is spiritual in that sense. The mistake the Jews had made was to regard the letter only; they took a carnal view of the Law. That was the "veil" that was still over their faces, as the Apostle says later in the same chapter. But the Christian view is that the Law is spiritual--not the letter

but the spirit; spirit in contrast to letter. The non-spiritual view of the Law regards it as concerned only with external actions. But the spiritual view of the Law, knows that it is as much concerned about motives as it is about actions. "Thou shalt not covet." The moment a man realizes that the Law so speaks, he has a spiritual view of the Law, and he realizes that the Law is spiritual. Again, the Law is spiritual in its intent, its concern is to lead to life. Paul has already stated that clearly in verse 2: "The commandment which was ordained to life." If only men had kept it, it would have led to life--"Do this, and thou shalt live." That is a spiritual matter. The Law, if carried out, leads to the life of God. We are reminded again of that here.

But, alas, we know something else also--"I am carnal, sold under sin." We have here what is, in many ways, the key statement of the whole of this section; and, as is his custom, the Apostle puts it right at the beginning, so that we may be able to understand throughout what he is saying. Here is the first fundamental and general statement. "Carnal!" The word itself actually means "fleshy," "pertaining to the flesh," "fleshly." We have already met with it several times. It is a description of man as he is by nature in contrast with the life of the spirit. The contrast is always "flesh" and "spirit." It means man's life as organized and lived apart from God and the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. It is really present in verse 5: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." You have it again in verse 6: "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." We interpreted that as saying that "the oldness of the letter" is characteristic of being "under the law," which is the same as being "in the flesh." A man who is "in the flesh" is "under the law." So when he says here, "I am carnal," he does not mean that the flesh which remained in him was carnal, he does not say that there was something that was still within him which was carnal; he says that he himself is carnal--"I am carnal."

In Scripture the term "carnal" is used in two main ways.

The FIRST is the one I have already been expounding, and which you find again, for instance, in the next chapter in verses 5-9. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit"--mark the contrast--"the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally

minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh"--these carnal and carnally minded people--"cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Such is the common use of the term.

But there is a SECOND use of the term "carnal." We find it in the First Epistle to the Corinthians at the beginning of chapter 3. Notice how the Apostle puts it: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" There Paul describes the "carnal" person as one who is "a babe in Christ," an immature Christian, a Christian who lacks fuller understanding. He says, "I could not give you the fuller truth that I would have liked to have given you, because you are still carnal." Obviously he means that though they were born again and had become Christians, they are still "babes in Christ," and so much of their thinking is still that old type of thinking. In other words he says that they were behaving as if they were still "carnal." What else can be possibly mean? They are born again, and they are therefore "in the Spirit"; and yet he says that they are "carnal." The Apostle can only mean that they are carnal in the sense that they go on thinking in the old way in which they used to think before they became spiritual.

Those are the only two uses of this word carnal that we find in the Scripture. What light does the first use throw on this statement, "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal?" Are we not already in a position to draw out an inference? This statement cannot possibly be about the mature Apostle Paul. He cannot say of himself as the Apostle who wrote this Epistle to the Romans "I am carnal," if by "carnal" you mean what he says it means in the next chapter, verses 5-9. But it cannot possibly carry the second use either, because that would mean that the Apostle is a mere "babe in Christ," for in writing to the Corinthians he not only tells them that they are babes, and that he cannot give them the spiritual

teaching which a spiritual man could give them, he also tells them in chapter 2 of that Epistle that there are other Christians of whom it can be said that they are "spiritual," that they have the "mind of Christ," and that "he that is spiritual judgeth all things," etc. There is the type of Christian who can follow his exalted teaching; the Corinthians cannot do so because they are "carnal," mere "babes." It is patently clear, therefore, that the Apostle cannot possibly be saying of himself, "I am carnal," in that sense.

"But I"--who is this? He is someone who is "carnal." Look through your Bibles as to the meaning of the word carnal; try to find something over and above what I have put before you, and then face this question. Is this a description of the Apostle Paul when he wrote this Epistle? Is it a description of a Christian man who has matured as much as it is possible for a Christian to mature and to develop while he is alive in this world? For the moment do not go further than that. This is a preliminary and a key statement. We must not rush past it. "I am carnal." It is not the only thing that is true about this "I"; there is something further which we shall go on to consider--"sold under sin." We have surely realized already that there is no glib or easy answer to the problem posed by this section. We must proceed cautiously and reverently, giving every word and statement its full value, and above all, free from a desire to assert our particular point of view. May we all seek that "unction" and "anointing" from "the holy One; for the matter with which we are dealing is beyond the realm of grammar and intellectual dexterity.

### **ROMANS 7:14,15.**

**"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.**

**"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." --**

As we proceed with this difficult, much-discussed and controversial section of this 7th chapter of this Epistle we must gird up the loins of our minds, and make a real effort to understand. We must not give up because the subject matter is difficult. You will then find happening to you what is the almost universal experience of all Law students. When students first begin to listen to lectures on a subject they often feel on the



first few occasions not only that they know nothing at all of what is being said, but that probably they will never be able to understand. There is only one thing to do at that point, and that is to go on listening. If you go on listening you will begin to find that more than you had ever realized is sinking and seeping in, and you will wake up one day and say, "Ah, I now see what it is about, I am beginning to understand." Do not be impatient with yourself when you are studying a difficult passage in Scripture; keep on, hold on, reading or listening; and suddenly you will find that not only do you know much more than you thought you knew, but you will be able to follow and to understand. It is necessary that one should say things like that from time to time, because the devil is ever at hand to say to us, "This or that is of no use to you, you cannot follow it, leave it to the theologians." Do not listen to him, but say "I belong to the Christian family and I intend to listen and to read until I do understand it." Do that, and you will not only defeat the enemy, but you will soon find that you have an understanding.

As we have already seen, the Apostle starts with a general proposition: "We know that the law is spiritual." Well, then, if the Law is spiritual, where does the trouble lie? What is wrong? Why are things as they are? And he answers the question in the second half of the 14th verse. The trouble is that "I am carnal." But I am not only carnal, I am also sold under sin." Here is the new phrase, here is a most remarkable statement. As far as I can make out, all the commentators are agreed that this is the most significant statement in the whole section, whatever view they may happen to take of it. This is the key phrase in many senses, and especially when taken with the previous one, "I am carnal." The two go together. "I am carnal"--indeed, "sold under sin." The commentators who belong to the Reformed tradition and who generally take the view that this is a description of the regenerate man, indeed of Paul himself when writing, are honest enough, most of them, to admit that this statement is their major difficulty, the one they find most difficult to explain. Of course they then proceed to try to explain it. Whatever view you may take of this section, you will find yourself hard put to it at some point or another.

That is a great comfort to all of us. Whatever your view of this section there will be particular statements which will trouble you, and there comes the danger, the tendency just to twist things a little, or modify them, in order to make them fit in. We must try to avoid that. But all are in

trouble.

Those who take the view that this is a description of the regenerate man at his best, even as he will be until he dies, are in particular trouble with this phrase, "sold under sin." All are agreed that it is a very strong term. It means "sold" or "disposed of" "into slavery." There is no doubt about the meaning. "Sold under sin" means that I am "sold into a condition of slavery to sin," that I am "a slave" to sin. Sin is the master and I am the slave. That is the plain meaning of the actual words used by the Apostle. He does not say that we have sold ourselves into this slavery; what he says is that we are in this condition of slavery. He is not concerned here to argue as to how we have arrived there. But here he just makes the statement that we are slaves of sin, sold as slaves in the market unto, into the position of, and under, the governance of sin.

Another remark we must make about this statement is that it applies to the man, and not merely a part of the man, whoever he is, whom the Apostle is describing. He is not saying "The law is spiritual, but a part of me is carnal, a part of me is a slave to sin." What he says is, "I am carnal, I am sold under sin." There is nothing here to suggest that he is only referring to the sinful part of himself. It is a statement made about the man as a whole. That is a most important point for us to grasp. What, then, is the meaning of this statement? Surely this is a reference back to some statements he has already made in chapter 6. Take verse 16 for instance: "Know ye not," he says, "that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "Servants" means "slaves," being sold as slaves. Then in the 17th verse we read: "God be thanked, that ye were the slaves of sin," and so on. Verse 18 mentions it again, putting it positively, "Being then made free from sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness." When you were taken out of that slavery to sin you became the slaves of righteousness. Note also the 20th verse: "For," he says, "when ye were the slaves of sin, ye were free from righteousness." I suggest that he is still using the same picture here, the same analogy, the same terms. "I am carnal, the slave of sin."

So we proceed to ask a question. We must ask these questions as we go on in order that we may build up our evidence so as to try to arrive at a conclusion. Of whom is such a statement true?

That leads to the next question. Is this, then, a description of the regenerate man? Here again I have no hesitation in asserting equally strongly that it is not, and that it cannot be so. Why not the regenerate? Because that would be to fly in the face of everything that the Apostle has been telling us from chapter 5, verse 20. Indeed, we could even go back to the beginning of chapter 5; but it becomes especially cogent in verse 20. "Moreover," he says, "the law entered." Now that is what we are dealing with in this 7th chapter--the place and function of the Law. "When the law came, sin revived, and I died." "The law entered." Why has the Law entered? "That the offence might abound." Does that mean that our situation is hopeless, worse than ever? No, says Paul, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." That is his great theme and contention. Then he goes on, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." That was once our position; sin "reigned" over us. From verse 12 until verse 19 Paul has been describing what was true of us all. But the Apostle's whole contention is, that we are no longer in Adam, we are in Christ; we are no longer "under the law," we are under grace. We compared these two reigns most carefully--the reign of sin and the reign of grace bringing out the "much more" idea that he has used several times in that famous section of chapter 5, "Much more," "More abundantly." "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many shall be made righteous." "Not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." Those are his phrases, and he used this word "abundance" in verse 17--"which receive abundance of grace." It is this superabounding" element that the Apostle is concerned about in that entire chapter. I say, therefore, that you cannot apply these words, "I am carnal, sold under sin," to a man who is no longer "under sin" but he is now "under grace." The "much more" of the gospel has come in where the regenerate man is concerned. He is under "the reign of grace"; so this statement cannot be true of the regenerate man.

Indeed we have an explicit statement again in the 2nd verse of chapter 6 where the Apostle takes up this point. Someone says, "Very well, in the light of your teaching, what you are really saying is that we can sin as much as we like because grace will much more abound." "God forbid," says Paul, "How shall we that died to sin"--we have done so, we have

died to sin; it is the aorist tense--"How shall we that died to sin, live any longer therein?" You recall his exposition of that truth, and how he proceeds to establish it, to work it out in detail, in terms of our "union" with the Lord Jesus Christ. How, then, can you possibly say of such a man that he is "carnal," that he is "sold under sin?" He was in that condition once, but he is no longer there.

Then, on the basis of that, Paul goes on to make his exhortation in verse 12: "Let not sin therefore...." He says that we must not let sin reign, and need not let sin reign, even in our mortal bodies. But if the regenerate man is carnal, and "sold under sin," how can that be reconciled with the exhortation to the regenerate, "Let not sin reign in your mortal body?" Then there is the statement of verse 14 in that chapter, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Why? "Because you are no longer under law, but under grace." Sin does not have "dominion" over the man who is "under grace" and no longer "under law." Indeed the whole chapter seems to go on repeating the same thing. Verse 17 runs, "God be thanked, ye were the servants of sin"; but you are so no longer, because "you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that was delivered you." Then in verse 18: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness." I repeat these statements because the Apostle has repeated them, and in so doing he has prepared the way for what he is saying here in chapter 7. Yet so many seem to expound chapter 7 as if they had never read chapter 6. Take again verse 20: "For when ye were slaves of sin, ye were free from righteousness." Can you still say that about a man who is regenerate? Can you say that he is still the slave of sin, "sold under sin?" And then finally, verse 22: "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Those statements surely cannot be reconciled with the notion that "I am carnal, sold under sin" is a description of a regenerate man at any stage of development. That seems to me to be a denial of everything the Apostle has been setting out to establish in chapters 5 and 6.

But, indeed, Paul has already said the same thing even in this chapter 7 itself. Look at that magnificent statement in the 4th verse: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." Why? "That you should bring forth fruit unto God." We could not

bring forth fruit unto God while we were married to the Law. Thank God we are no longer married to the Law, we are married to Christ in order that we might bear offspring, "bring forth fruit" to Him. We are no longer "under sin" but "under grace," and that is why as Christians we can and should bring forth fruit. Again we find the same thing in verse 6. He puts it negatively in verse 5, saying, "When we were in the flesh"--far from bringing forth fruit unto God "the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held," or "being dead to that wherein we were held"--"that (in order that) we should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." The attempt at service in the "oldness of the letter" brings forth nothing but fruit unto death. We are now in "newness of spirit" in our service, and we are going to "bring forth fruit unto God." I cannot reconcile the idea that verse 14 is a description of a regenerate man, with verses 4 and 6 in this same 7th chapter. Then, when I go to chapter 8, I am in still greater difficulty. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," says verse 1. Verses 2-4 state, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; (in order) that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

We shall find, later, that those who hold that this is a description of a regenerate man have to add a footnote in which they say, "Of course, that is not the whole truth about the regenerate man; what is said in chapter 8 is also true of the regenerate man." To which my reply is that these two things cannot be true at one and the same time; I am either "sold under sin" or I am not. Each one of us is in one of two positions. I am either "sold under sin" or I am "sold under Christ." I am either a slave to sin or I am a slave of grace and of God and of righteousness, as the Apostle has put it so many times in chapter 6. In any case he is talking about a whole man and not merely about a part of a man. The word is "I"--not "a part of me." He does not say this is the partial truth about me; but "I am carnal, sold under sin."

But let us go on to verse 15, because it will help us to see this point still more clearly. In verse 15, as I indicated in the general analysis, the

Apostle goes on to describe the kind of life lived by the person whom he has described in verse 14. "For"--note the continuation--"For that which I do I allow not." I, who am carnal and sold under sin--this is true of me, "I do what I allow not." Indeed, further: "What I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I." Note well the description of this man, and observe, once more, that the Apostle is not describing merely one part of this man; he is describing the whole man. He is not only describing the sinful part of this man, because he cannot say of the sinful part of this man that it desires to keep the Law, but he says, "That which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate that do I." He is talking about the whole person, and as I say, this connecting word "For" surely proves and establishes that fact.

It is interesting to notice how those who take the view that the regenerate man is under consideration try to water down this statement. They must, of course, do so. So what they say is this, "The Apostle, of course, was a most vehement kind of man, a man with powerful emotions, and now and again he gets carried away and uses hyperbole, he exaggerates, and he has been exaggerating here." They say "He is not as bad as he says he is; he puts it as a bald statement, but he does not really mean that that is true of the man." Let me quote one of them who puts it thus: "What is being expressed here is the Apostle's deep regret that his heart and life were not entirely spiritual, not perfectly in accordance with divine Law. What Paul is saying is that he felt "as if" he were the slave of a tyrant; not that he is, but "as if" he were the slave of a tyrant who employed him in work which he abhorred. His prevailing desire--note the word "prevailing"--"was perfect conformity to a holy, just, and good law; yet he felt that much was wanting, much was wrong." To me, that is a travesty of what the Apostle himself actually says here. He is not saying that his "prevailing" mood is all right, but that "much was wanting, much was wrong." Look again to the words of the Apostle: "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

What, then, is Paul saying here? What is the meaning of this word "allow"--"That which I do I allow not?" The real meaning of the word is "to know," as if he were saying "that which I do, I really do not know why I am doing it." In other words he means, "I do not understand why I am doing it." Indeed it means, "I do not approve of what I am doing; that is

not my understanding of these matters, so that when I do these things I do not understand myself, as it were. I am doing something which is the opposite of the view I hold." That is the meaning of the word "allow" "I don't know," "I don't understand," "I don't approve."

The other word we must look at is the word "hate," because again it is a very strong word. Paul is saying that he not merely disapproves of what he does, but he hates it, he abominates it. These are very significant statements.

Let us look closely at this 15th verse. It is a tremendous statement, a profound bit of analysis, a striking example of "biblical psychology." We must be clear that the Apostle is not saying that he is "always doing evil" and that he "never does any good at all." That would be to ridicule the whole position. The Apostle is not saying so, but some have interpreted it in that way, as if the Apostle is saying, "Everything I do is wrong, and I never do that which is right." Obviously he is not saying that.

SECONDLY, while I assert that Paul is not saying that he always does wrong and never does right, at the same time we have no right to insinuate the word "sometimes" or "occasionally." You will find that many commentators have recourse to these words. It is their only way out of the difficulty that arises for them because they think that a regenerate man is in view. So they express the case thus: "That which I occasionally do, I allow not, for what I would, I occasionally do not, but what I hate, that I occasionally do." I argue that it is as wrong to insinuate, to insert, the words "occasionally" or "sometimes," as it is to say that he "always" did wrong and never did right.

My THIRD comment has reference to the word "do." "That which I do." Have we any right to say that what Paul means by "do" has no reference to actions but only to thought and imagination. You will find that some of the commentators who say that this was a regenerate man speak in that way. They say, "You must not understand this as saying that Paul is actually doing these various things. No, no! Paul was such a spiritual man that if he thought of an action he said, "I have done it," or if he imagined it, he had "done it."" Of course, there is a sense in which that is true, as we have seen in expounding the previous section, but my question is: Have we the right to confine this word "do" to thought and imagination only, and to exclude actions?

FOURTHLY, is it not obvious that this is a description, not so much of what is only occasionally or invariably true about this man, but of the man's life on balance, as a whole, looked at generally. Surely any unbiased reading must lead to that conclusion. "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. What I do, I allow not, for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I"--not invariably, not occasionally; but looking at my life as a whole, looking at it on balance, this is what is true.

And if this be so, surely, then, we can take the next step. If this is what is true of my life, looked at as a whole and taken on balance, then it is a description of a life of frustration, defeat and failure. Am I going too far? If you think so, my answer is to refer you to verse 24, "O wretched man that I am!" and so on, which is clearly a description of frustration, defeat, and failure.

So I ask once more, Who is being described here in the 15th verse? It is the same question as I asked in the 14th verse.

What then of the regenerate? I answer carefully and guardedly. What is said here about this man's experience is true in a measure of the experience of the regenerate. I will go further. It is true of the experience of all regenerate persons in a measure. He still has a fight to wage, that is why he is exhorted, as Paul exhorts him in verses 11, 12 and 13 of chapter 6. But while I say that this is true in a measure, and only in a measure, of the regenerate, it is certainly not a description of the regenerate man as he is in general. It is not a description of the man to whom those exhortations are made, and to any of whom those glowing, wonderful statements have been made in chapters 5 and 6. The regenerate man, when he falls into sin, has to say that he has done something which he does not believe in doing; he is aware that he is not already perfect; but he does not speak of himself as a man who lives a frustrated, defeated life of failure. If so, he is not paying heed to the exhortation of the Apostle who says "Let not sin reign in your mortal body." And it cannot be a description of the Paul who could write, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Philippians 3:13-21.) So I reject the idea that this statement is about the regenerate man even at his best.

Therefore I end with this statement: Verse 15, we can safely say, is true



of a man who has come to see the spiritual character of the Law. He sees that he should keep it. It is indeed a description of a man who "desires" to keep it, but who finds in practice that he cannot. He sees that the Law is spiritual; he admires it, he wants to keep it; but try as he will, he cannot keep it. I suggest that verse 15 says no more than that--that that is all the Apostle meant it to say at this point. Otherwise stated, this verse is nothing but an account of what is true in actual practice of the man described in verse 14. This is the truth about a man who is "carnal, sold under sin," who nevertheless sees the spiritual character of the Law. He sees it but he cannot attain to it. The Law does not enable him to keep the Law. I end with a question. Does this verse say anything more than that?

We shall go on to consider the two inferences the Apostle draws from this striking statement, in verses 16 and 17.

#### **ROMANS 7:16-20**

**"If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.**

**"Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." --.**

We continue our study of the closely reasoned argument which the Apostle develops and applies in this section of this 7th chapter. He is still telling us certain things about this "man" whom he is describing. He has already told us that he is "carnal," and "under sin," and in consequence, that which he does, he does not allow, he does not understand, he does not approve of. Indeed he says that that which he wills to do, he does not do, but what he hates, that he does. Having said that about the man, and having described the kind of life which this man lives, he now proceeds to draw two deductions concerning his whole position.

The first deduction is in verse 16, and the second in verse 17.

The FIRST deduction is: "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good." This is just an obvious and an inevitable piece of logic. The fact that he regrets his actions, and does not approve of them at all, means clearly that he agrees with what the Law says about them. And that, of course, in turn means that his view of the Law is that it is essentially good and right in all its demands and in all its

condemnations. That is the first deduction.

The word "consent" is an interesting one; its root meaning is "I speak with." Here is something or someone speaking; well, I "speak with it," I am in agreement with it, I approve of it, I praise it. Here I am, says the Apostle, I am doing certain things which I do not want to do, which I do not approve of. But the Law, likewise, does not approve of them; it condemns them. Well then, he says, is it not obvious that I am in agreement with the Law," Am I not saying that the Law is good? The very fact that I condemn what I do, and thereby am condemning what the Law condemns, means that I am in agreement with the Law; in other words I am proclaiming that the Law of God is good, is excellent. He has already said that we know it is "spiritual"; he now says that we also know that it is "good."

The question we have to ask at this point is, Why does the Apostle speak in this way? Why does he draw that deduction? He must have some reason for doing so.

I answer: You can tell what a man is concerned about by the deductions which he draws; and, here, in these two verses the Apostle reminds us again of his real object in writing this paragraph. We see again that his object was not merely to state his experience--that is not what he is concerned to do at all--he is concerned to prove something concerning the Law.

Firstly, he intends to show that the Law itself is in no way responsible for his failure in practice. "Here is my position," he is virtually saying; "I do that which I would not"; well, clearly, the Law is not responsible for my sin. At heart, I am in agreement with the Law and regard it as good. It is obvious, then, that the Law is not responsible for the way in which I am living." He was most concerned to say this, because he was being charged by some of his opponents as saying that "the Law is sin." He was also charged with saying that the Law "was made death" unto him. He is answering these charges and saying that, whatever is responsible for his failure in practice, it is not the Law.

A related purpose is to show that his teaching concerning the Law does not involve any criticism of the Law in and of itself, still less a condemnation of the Law. That, again, was a charge that was being brought against him. There were various Jews who were saying that his

preaching of what he called "the doctrine of grace" was nothing but an attack upon the Law, a denouncing of the Law. His answer is, that the very fact that he denounces the things he does, that he does that which he would not, is proof positive that he consents to the Law "that it is good." His preaching of salvation by grace, and of justification by faith only, is not a criticism of the Law, for he regards the Law as "good." There is nothing wrong with the Law. His failure is not in any sense due to the Law. So, once more, the Apostle makes a statement which should keep us on the right lines in our exposition.

He is dealing with the Law, what the Law can do, what the Law cannot do--the place of the Law in God's economy and scheme and plan of salvation.

That brings us to the Second deduction in verse 17. "Now then," he says, "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." How does he arrive at this deduction? He seems to say, "What I have just been saying raises a problem. Here am I, saying that what I do I do not want to do, I do not will to do. I do not approve of it, and I am in agreement with the Law which condemns it." The question then immediately and obviously arises, How does sin happen at all? Why does this man sin at all? It is clear that it is not the Law that does it. Well then, what does? "Here is my problem," Paul seems to say, "the Law is not responsible, and I myself do not want to do these things. I believe that they are wrong, I reprobate them; nevertheless I do them. What is responsible? How does this come to pass?" His answer is one of the most daring, and one of the most profound things that has ever been said; it is one of the most astonishing statements in the whole of the Bible. It must clearly be handled with great care. This is what he says: "I agree with the Law and with what it says, and with what it prohibits. Therefore I hate sin; I do not desire to do it." How, then, is sin committed, and why?, is the question that inevitably meets him, and he replies: "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." It is a logical deduction, it is an inevitable deduction once more.

But what precisely is the Apostle saying here? This is not only one of the most daring sayings in the Scripture; it is at the same time one of the most difficult. Who is this "I" to whom the Apostle is referring? In verse 16, "If then I do that which I would not"--does the "I" refer to the same person in both its uses? In my view, it cannot be so. The first "I" refers to the whole personality, the man who is speaking, the man who is acting,

the whole man. But the second "I" obviously does not refer to the whole man. This is now no longer the whole personality; he is speaking now of a part of himself only. Which part? I answer: the part of him which has now been able to recognize the spiritual character of the Law. That is the second "I." This is where the exposition becomes difficult. The "I" looks as if it is the same in both cases, but it cannot be. "I do"--there is the man, the personality acting. Yes, but "I would not"--there is a special part of the man, the part that agrees with the Law.

In other words, in verse 16 the Apostle introduces the division in the personality of this man whom he is describing. There is a kind of "duality" here, and my contention is that this duality is introduced for the first time at this particular point, and it is certainly present here in verse 17. This is what he says therefore. "Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." This "I" in verse 17 is certainly the "I" to whom the Law has "come" in the way he has previously described, the "I" who is able to see that the Law is "spiritual."

We notice, then, that there is a duality in the man whom the Apostle is describing. He is able to say, "There is that in me now"--and he wants to identify himself with this--"that sees and agrees with the spiritual character of the Law, and therefore dislikes and disapproves the things I do." As a whole he is against this, but the man the Apostle is describing is a man who is divided in himself-- "It is no more I that do it." Now this "I," I maintain, is this aspect of the person that has come to realize that the Law of God is spiritual and good, and that what it prohibits should be prohibited. He agrees with that whole-heartedly. That is the "I" he is describing here.

We look next at the second phrase which reads, "sin that dwelleth in me." The Apostle here tells us two things about sin. The first is that sin is something that "dwells" in us, takes up its home in us. In other words, we must not think of sin as something that is altogether outside us. There are many who think of sin in that way. Man they regard as more or less neutral; and sin is that which comes from the outside as a temptation to us. But here we learn that sin is something that "dwells," makes its home within us, takes up its abode, is a part of us.

The other thing the Apostle emphasizes is sin's terrible power. "Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

This is one of the profoundest statements with respect to sin in the whole of the Bible. The Apostle says that even though you are enlightened as to the spiritual character of the Law of God, it is not enough. Knowledge alone can never solve this problem, it has already failed to do so. What man needs is not knowledge; it is power. The problem of sin is not a problem of knowledge, of instruction or of information. Here is a man who has it, says Paul, "I do that which I would not." "I consent to the law that it is good"--I am in absolute agreement with it yet here I am doing the exact opposite.

What explains this? "It is not I," says Paul, "it is sin that dwelleth in me." I say again that it is one of the profoundest statements that has ever been made with regard to the nature of sin, and the whole problem of sin.

But in order to see the matter still more clearly, let us glance at verses 18-20, because these verses are really nothing but an extended explanation of the statement in verse 17. In verse 17 Paul has made a startling claim and reached a staggering conclusion; so he feels it is necessary that it should be amplified. He proceeds to this in these three verses. First of all--"For," connecting with what has just been said, "For I know that in me (that is to say, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." In other words, at the end of verse 20 he is back to what he said in verse 17.

Here we see the extreme difficulty of expressing in human language the truth with which the Apostle is grappling. I say that once more in order to encourage those who may find all this very difficult. I assure you that I myself find it very difficult. This is one of the most difficult passages that one is ever called upon to handle; hence the various disagreements about it. I will go further. I believe that even the Apostle himself found this difficult. You may ask how I could ever make such a suggestion. It is because I find him inserting a statement in brackets. "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." Why did he use these brackets and interject that particular qualifying statement? In my view it was because he knew well that when those Christians in Rome were listening to someone reading this Letter to them--remember that they did not have it in print as we have; someone would read out the Letter and

they would listen--they might well find it difficult to follow the argument with this frequent use of "I." So he proceeds to help them and to clarify his meaning. The statement in verse 17, if you take trouble to understand it, is quite clear, but the Apostle was a very wise and loving teacher. He takes nothing for granted, and he wants to help us; so because of the difficulty of expressing in words this extraordinary, complicated character of man in sin, and especially after he is enlightened by the Law, the Apostle now explains briefly what he means. The qualifying phrase--"(that is to say, in my flesh)"--is introduced to prevent misunderstanding. He is working out the duality he has introduced in verses 16 and 17.

You may well feel for a moment that the Apostle is "making confusion worse confounded." But let none be so foolish as to complain about Paul's manner of writing. This subject is difficult because sin is difficult. One of the terrible things sin did when it came into the world was to introduce complications. Life in the Garden of Eden, in Paradise, was very simple until sin came in; but the moment sin entered complications arose. The first sin had to be covered, and they went and hid themselves. Then they began to lie, and so the process has continued ever since. Do not blame the Truth, do not blame God, do not blame the Law, do not blame the Apostle Paul; it is this foul sin that has produced these complications in man. It is all illustrated here most clearly. Let us take the phrases. "For I know," he says, "that in me dwelleth no good thing." Which "me" is this? This "me" obviously is the same "me" as the one of whom it can be said that "sin dwelleth in me." Here he calls it the "flesh." That is the same thing. There is a "me" in whom sin dwells. That, he says, is the "flesh." That is the first "me": "For I know that in me." The "I" who knows this is again the whole personality. But the "me" is not the whole personality; the "me," this first "me," is only a part of this "personality," the "I," who knows this. And what he knows about this "me" that is in him is, that there is no good thing dwelling in him. Sin dwells in him, yes, but no good dwells in him. There is no good whatsoever in that part of this man's personality. That is the first "me."

Then let us go further with the Apostle. He says next, "for to will is present with me." Is this the same "me" as the first? It cannot be. Why not? For the good reason that he has already told us about the first "me" that there is no good in him at all; but about this "me" he says that "to will" is present with him. To will what? To will to keep the Law, to do good,

and to please God. So it cannot be the same "me" as the first one. "To will is present with me," but there is no good at all in the other "me"; there is a great deal of good in this "me." In other words, this second "me" is the same as the "I" in verse 17: "Now then it is no more I that do it." This is the "I" that "consents to the Law that it is good, that hates that which is wrong, but nevertheless does it, that delights in the Law of God. So we have different uses of "me" in this verse.

Then Paul says further, "for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not." Who is this "I"? Is this "I" the first "me" or the second "me"? The answer is, neither! Well, who is this "I"? It is the man himself, it is the whole personality. This "I" at the end of verse 18 is one who is able to speak about the two "me's" that are in him.

This not only sounds complicated, but it is complicated; it is the complicated condition of a man who is enlightened by the Spirit of God and about the Law of God. This is what he discovers about himself. Have you not done so? Here I am, a personality, an entity, a being. I am myself, the man I am. But I can talk about the "me" and the "me" that are in me. There is a "me" of whom I can say no good. I am personalizing the position, putting in terms of myself the statement made by the Apostle. I am aware within myself of a "me," an entity as it were that has no good belonging to him at all. But I am also equally aware of another "me" that desires to do good, that consents to the Law of God, that agrees with it and wants to live the godly life.

This "I," this person that I am, is able to look on at both and is aware of both. This is my predicament, to will is present with me (this second "me"), but how to perform (in the presence of that first "me" that is in me) I know not.

Verses 19 and 20 present no new problem because they are but repetitions of what Paul has already said. Verse 19 is practically an exact repetition of verse 15, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." He repeats it surely for the reason that this subject is so difficult to state that you have to go on repeating it; and as you do so, at last people begin to grasp it. He is just working it out once more.

What, then, is the Apostle concerned to say in all this? Let me put it in the form of three conclusions.

1. First, he is not disclaiming responsibility for his actions or even excusing himself. That is something that we must never do. But there have been people who have done so, and it has involved them in the most terrible and "damnable heresies." To what has it led? It has led to Antinomianism which has made them say, "Ah, it is not I who am sinning, it is my flesh that is sinning; I am not responsible, I do not want to sin, therefore it is not I who am doing these things." They use the language of the Apostle but in a very different way from the Apostle. They do it to excuse sin; they go on sinning and say that it does not matter what a man does. There was a teaching called "Dualism" in the early Church, which said that sin belonged only to the body. It claimed that that was apostolic teaching; that the man himself was saved, it was only his body that was sinning, and as the body was going to die in any case, it did not really matter whether he sinned or not. "I do not sin," they said, "it is my body that is sinning." They were even saying that our Lord's body was not a real body, for much the same reason. There is no more terrible and dangerous heresy. The early Church abominated it. There can be little doubt but that the Apostle John wrote his First Epistle very largely in order to counter that heresy. There is an old tradition that John was going into a public bath on one occasion but that when he heard that one of the teachers of this foul heresy was using the same bath-house he would not even enter the building. There is no more terrible perversion of the Christian teaching than this kind of thing. The Apostle Paul is not excusing the man he describes here, he is not disclaiming responsibility for himself; what he is doing is to make a confession. He is virtually saying: "That is the truth about me, that is the weakness in which I find myself, that is the paralysis that I am aware of; that is my useless struggle." He does not say, "All is well, and it does not matter what I do." No, he wants to get out of this condition, as he will tell us later when he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" It is the exact opposite of the foul teaching of Dualism, and the dangerous trap of Antinomianism.

2. Secondly, we conclude that what the Apostle is concerned to do here is to show the terrible power of sin. In other words, as I have indicated throughout, this section of chapter 7 is a commentary on verse 13. "Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid! But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." Paul is showing us



what a terribly foul thing is sin. It is in us, it is resident, it "dwells" in us, and it has this awful power that paralyses us even when we have come to see the true nature of the Law and therefore the true nature of sin.

3. Our third and last conclusion is that Paul is showing us again the complete inability of the Law to deliver us even when we see clearly its spiritual character, that it is of God, that it is holy, and just, and good. Though we may see that with all clarity, it completely fails to deliver us. In other words, in all this complicated piece of psychology and self-analysis at its most brilliant, the Apostle is really not concerned about himself and his own experience as such. He is not even concerned about this bit of psychological analysis. What he is concerned to show is that the Law can never deliver us. Our only hope, as he has already said in verse 4 is, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that (in order that) you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." While I am married to the Law, even though I see its spiritual character, I can never bring forth fruit. "How to perform that which is good, I find not." That is what Paul is emphasizing. It supplies the most overwhelming demonstration of the truth that even the "holy," "just," "good" Law of God cannot deliver man from the thralldom and the tyranny of sin.

It is a wonderful statement. Whatever you and I may make of it in detail, Paul never forgot what he was setting out to do. He was not setting out just to talk about himself; but to demonstrate that he revered the Law of God. But though it is so essentially and altogether good it could not deliver man from sin, it was never given in order to do so. It was given that men might come to see "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," and be led by it as a sort of pedagogue, a schoolmaster, to Christ. It was never meant to be an end, but a means to an end. Paul is showing what "the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh."

All along in his deductions, in his explanations, he keeps on reminding us that that is what he is concerned about. He is dealing the whole time with the Law, and all he says about this "man" is simply to illustrate the truth about the Law, and how it is rendered null by the flesh, by "the sin that dwelleth in me."

## **ROMANS 7:21-23**

**"I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.**

**"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:**

**"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." --**

Thus the Apostle continues the great argument of this section of the Epistle. He goes on from point to point, from step to step. He makes a statement and then proves it; then he takes up another and again demonstrates and proves it. All is focused, of course, on the place of the Law in the life of the Christian. That is his main concern. He is concerned to exonerate himself from various charges that were brought against him; but he is much more concerned to show the truth about the Law, to show what the Law was meant to do, and to show particularly what the Law was never meant to do, and what it most certainly cannot do. His point is, that in showing all this, he is not in any way derogating from the greatness of the Law.

We come then to this statement in verse 21, "I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." Obviously in this statement he is in a sense summing up what he has just been saying. The word "then" tells us so. "Very well," he seems to say, "this is what I find, this is what I have discovered." At the same time he is repeating one of the general statements he has already made, as found, for instance, in verses 14 and 15: "For I know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." But it is not just a repetition. The Apostle never merely repeats what he has been saying. He does re-emphasize, but generally you will find that there is a shade of difference, as is the case here. What he was concerned to show in the previous three verses, 18, 19 and 20, as we have seen, was why it is that he performs evil acts though he does not want to do so. In these verses 21-23, however, he shows why he fails to do what he wants to do. There are two things that are wrong about this man; he does what he does not want to do, and also fails to do what he wants to do. That is the dual aspect of his problem. In the previous verses he was mainly concerned with showing why it was that he does the evil that he would not do, and comes to the conclusion that it is no more he that is doing it, but sin that dwells in him.

The Apostle now takes up the other side. Why is it that he cannot do what he really wants to do? He begins: "I find then a law." Actually what he wrote was "I find the law." "The" law, not "a" law. What does he mean here by "the law?" He has been talking about the Law of God before as we know. He says, "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. If then I do that I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good." Is he here talking about that same Law? Clearly he is not doing so. This is not a matter of opinion, but something that really can be proved. In verse 22 he says, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Why does he call it there "the law of God?" So far he has been referring to it as "the law," and not as "the law of God," because hitherto he has only been dealing with "the law of God." But here in verse 21 he is talking about another kind of law, some other law. So when he comes back to the Law of God he has to make it clear that that is what he is talking about. Therefore he says, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (v. 22). That is his way of telling us that in verse 21 he was not talking about the Law of God. This is a very important point for us to remember, because we shall find that he again uses this term "law" in still another sense. But there should be no trouble about it if we only pay careful attention to the way in which the Apostle writes. The reference here then is not to "the Law of God," neither is he referring to "the law of sin" that dwells in him.

What, then, is he saying here? He says in effect, "This is my experience. There seems to be a principle working in me, indeed it is so constant that I can call it a veritable law. There seems to be a rule of action within me which works in such a definite manner that it is virtually a kind of law; and it seems to determine, to govern and to control what takes place within me. "I find the law." Or, we can look at the matter in the following way. Paul virtually says: "What I find is this, that invariably when I would do good, evil is present with me. This is something which seems to operate in me much as laws operate in nature--as the night follows the day, as you get spring, summer, autumn, winter with such regularity. I find that, as certainly as I want to do good, equally certainly is evil there." That is a law of the man's life and experience. It is so regular, so certain, he says, that it seems to be an absolute law.

Notice how he expresses the matter--"evil," he says, "is present with me." That means "always at hand," "always lying near." "Whenever I will to do

good, evil is always there, always asserting itself, jumping forward. The moment I act with this mind of mine, evil jumps in, persistent in its opposition, never absent. The moment I will to do good, evil is there." I thus paraphrase what he is saying.

Verses 22 and 23 are simply an exposition of this theme. Just as we found that verses 18, 19 and 20 were an exposition of verse 17, so verses 22 and 23 are an exposition of verse 21. That is the Apostle's typical and characteristic method. One cannot imagine a better one. Proposition, then proof; and on he goes, advancing the whole argument.

Let us see what he has to say. "For," he says--letting us know that he is going to explain what he has been saying; "For" this is what it comes to in practice--"I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Here is a very significant statement again. Take first of all the word "delight." Notice that there is a progression in the statements here made about the Law. Paul began in verse 14 by saying, "We know that the law is spiritual." In verse 16, "I consent unto the law that it is good." But now he goes beyond that, and says "I delight in it." He means by that, not merely that he "agrees" with the Law, or that the Law is itself spiritual and good and carries his consent and his approbation. He speaks more strongly, and says, "I rejoice, I exult in the law of God."

It is a very strong statement. He undoubtedly had in mind here what the Psalmist tells us in the First Psalm about the good man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord," "the law of God."

Then we come to a most important term, "the inward man." This expression plays a very great part in the discussion of the exact interpretation of this passage. Those who hold the traditional Reformed view have to lean very heavily upon it in their endeavour to prove that this is the regenerate man even at his very best. So they say that the "inward man" means the new man that is in this person. But it does not follow of necessity that this is a reference to the "new man" that is in the believer, for it seems to me that the Apostle himself tells us what he means by the "inward man" in the next verse. The verses read: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind." The second part of the statement supplies an explanation of what is meant by the "inward man" in the first part. The "inward man" is surely synonymous with "the mind." "I delight in

the law of God after the inward man," "the law of my mind"--"the law that is in my mind." Surely these are parallel statements. So the inward man, I deduce, is the mind, the understanding, the place of reason, the place where one is able to grasp truth. It means a mind illuminated by the Holy Spirit. But I cannot see that we are entitled to claim more for this term than just that. The matter will become clearer when we see how Paul contrasts the "inward man" with his "members."

What do the "members" represent? The word "members" stands for "the bodily organs," that part of man through which he normally expresses himself and functions in his general life in this world. So the contrast is obvious. The parts of us with which we normally sin are the parts that we can see, the eye and various other parts, normally termed the organs of the body. That is the outward man. But the "inward man" is the part of man that you cannot see. You cannot see a man thinking, you cannot see a man's mind. It is possible to see his brain but you cannot see his mind. That is why Paul calls it the "inward man" as distinct from this outward man that is visible. The "inward man" is described as the "hidden man of the heart"; it is that part of man which is not visible. This is as real, indeed much more real, than the things you can see; it goes on when the body is rotting in the grave. I say the "inward man" stands for that invisible part of man, the most vital part of man--soul, spirit and so on--and including the "mind," which is often used interchangeably with 'spirit.' Take, for instance, the way the Apostle puts the matter in 2 Corinthians 4:16. He says, "Though our outward man perish." Here he is referring to his body. He suffered much from sickness and illness, he suffered from weariness of the body, his "outward man" was decaying and dissolving. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." It is the same emphatic general contrast. It seems to me, therefore, that we have no right to press this term, the "inward man," beyond this general reference to that part of man that can be illuminated by the Spirit; we must think in terms of the mind, the understanding, that part of man which eventually comes to see the truth as it is in Christ Jesus fully. We may take it, therefore, that Paul is here referring to the "mind," as he calls it here in verse 23, as illuminated by the Spirit. In other words, what he is saying in effect is: "I have now come to see the true meaning of the Law." He has been saying that repeatedly since the 7th verse. There was a time when he was not illuminated, but now he has come to see the truth. The Holy Spirit has come upon him, the Law has "come" and he has

seen it--"sin revived, and I died." He sees that the Law is spiritual, that it is just, and right, and good, that it is holy; he even "rejoices in it."

So we pause once more and look at his statement. "I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

We have now reached this point. The Apostle finds that his daily constant experience is that the moment he wills to do good this other principle or "law" is there, suggesting, arguing. The fact is, he says, "I delight in the law of God after my mind, my understanding, what I really regard as myself (not my organs, not my body, not my flesh as it were, but this higher part of me); I delight in the law of God."

Why then does he not carry out the Law of God and live it and practise it? His answer is: "I see another law in my members." Here, again, we have a verse of crucial importance, as I remarked previously about verse 14. When we were dealing with verse 14, I emphasized that it seems to me to control its entire context. I say the same about this verse; so let us look at it very carefully. Paul says "I find another law." Now "another" does not mean another in a numerical sense, as if he meant, "I have already found one law in my mind but now I find a second." No! What he means is a "different law," not merely additional, but essentially different. He contrasts it with the law that is in his mind. There is a law in his "mind," and there is a law in his "members." Obviously this latter is not "the law of God," obviously it is not the law that operates in his mind now that he has come to see the real meaning of God's Law. No, this is yet another law. What he means is, that there is a permanent and controlling power and principle in his members that acts as a veritable law. It is not something that is there occasionally, and at other times absent; it is always there, it is a law, always present and always operating. That is why he calls it "a law in his members."

"Members" carries the same meaning, as we have seen, as "members" in the whole of chapter 6. It is that which he contrasts with the mind. This is the way he looks at man at this point. There is in man his mind; and there is the rest of him--his bodily organs and appetites, and all the rest. Now there is a "law" in the mind; and there is a "law" in this other part also. What does this other law do? He tells us very plainly; in the first place it "wars" against the law of his mind. This word "warring" is a very interesting one. "I find another law in my members, warring against . . ."

Its original meaning is "to render service in a military campaign."

It derives from the Greek word from which our word "strategy" comes, and that is a very good way of looking at it. Here then is this man, with his mind delighting in the Law of God; but there is another law operating in his members which has a fiendish, devilish strategy. It is always watching the moves of the other law in his mind, and it is countering every move. It has a definite strategy and wages a kind of military campaign. What Paul means is, that as certainly as he delights in the Law of God with his mind, and wants to do it, then this other law that is in his members begins to urge the opposite, and puts its opposition in an attractive form, and strives to dictate to him what he should do. He wants with the mind to serve the Law of God; but this other power brings out all its forces and reserves to prevent his doing so, and to make him do the exact opposite. That is what the Apostle emphasizes here. In this same verse he later calls it "the law of sin." The "law in his members" and "the law of sin" are identical.

Such then, is the picture. The first thing this "law in his members" does is to wage this war against the spiritual view of the Law, and his desire to keep it because he now delights in it. But unfortunately it does not stop at that. That would be bad enough, but it goes a stage further. It is not merely that the "law in the members" is warring against the "law of the mind," but Paul adds, "it brings me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

The crucial statement is, "brings me into captivity." All commentators agreed that "captivity" is a very strong word, and that it means, "making and taking prisoner." The original meaning of this word takes us back to a "spear," so the picture is this. Here are two men who have been fighting. One beats the other, and the conqueror now points his spear at the body of the man he has conquered. He has taken him prisoner. But he has not merely taken him prisoner, he has his spear pointed at him, and he says, "If you try to get away I shall push this spear through you. You are to walk from here to that door, go along." And he follows him with the spear pointing at him. The defeated man is a complete captive, he is conquered, and he is absolutely helpless at the point of the spear. That is the kind of thing, says Paul, that I find. I see this other law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity--into a position in which I am a hopeless prisoner at the point of

the spear.

My captor has "got" me. Such is the meaning of the word "captivity."

Notice that Paul says, "bringing me into captivity." We are not looking now at either of the "me's" we were considering earlier in verse 18; we are now looking at the man himself, the "I." This is the total personality. Paul is not merely saying that this "law in the members" brings the sinful part of him into captivity, though some of the expositors tell us so. But the moment they do so, they are falling into the dangerous heresy of Dualism, in which they are saying, "It is not I who am in captivity, it is only my sinful part; it is only my body, or something else within me." That is a wrong division of man which says "I am not sinning; it is only my body, or the sinful part of me, or the flesh. The law of sin in my members is sinning." But the Apostle is not saying that at all. He says it brings me, my total personality, into captivity. "I" am brought "into captivity to the law of sin that is in my members."

What then is the real meaning and purpose of this statement which, I repeat, is such a crucial one? Let us be clear first of all as to what Paul is not saying. Marcus Rainsford, a great commentator and godly preacher of the end of last century, says that the Apostle is "referring to the fact of the presence, power and tendency of indwelling sin as warring against the law of his mind," and to nothing more. He italicizes the word "tendency," and says that Paul is stating in very graphic language that there is this tendency for that part of him to "war against the law that is in my mind." To which I reply that Paul is saying no such thing. Paul is not merely describing a warfare. He does so at the beginning of the verse, but he says that the warfare leads to defeat, to captivity. He has himself been taken captive. He is not talking about a tendency to sin, he is talking about a captivity to sin.

But take also the exposition of Robert Haldane. Haldane was clearly in trouble here. He says, "How far this captivity extends cannot be known from the figure." I agree with him so far, but I regard it as significant that he should have had to make that comment. He says, "If the evil principle of our nature prevails in exciting one evil thought, it has taken us captive. So far it has conquered, and so far we are defeated and made prisoners." Then he goes on to say, "But this is quite consistent with the supposition that, on the whole, we may have the victory over sin." So



what Paul is saying here is this: "If you commit one sin you have been taken prisoner and made captive by sin, but on the whole you still have the victory over sin." But listen to Paul again, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." How can that possibly mean "that on the whole we may have the victory over sin?" Surely that is the exact opposite of what Paul is saying. He is most certainly not saying that on the whole we may have the victory over sin, but that on the whole sin is having a victory over us! The Apostle is saying that, looking at his life on the whole, this is what this man "finds," this is the law of his being, this is the regular state of his experience.

What the Apostle is asserting is that not merely is there a fight going on within the man (that is the first part of verse 23), he tells us about the result of the fight, the outcome of the fight. And the outcome of the fight is, as I am emphasizing, that he finds himself in captivity, he fails completely. The law that is in his members is too strong for the other law. "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. Though I delight in this law of God after the inward man, this other law keeps on coming in and brings me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Proof of the correctness of this exposition is found in verse 24. If Paul is saying here that on the whole this man is able to live the Christian life, and that on the whole he has victory over sin, why, in the name of all reason, does he go on to cry out in anguish, "O wretched man that I am!?" That would be meaningless, senseless! His cry, "O wretched man that I am!" is caused by the persistence of defeat, the feeling that he is down rather than up, that he meets with failure rather than success, that he is in captivity to sin. I cannot see how any other exposition of verse 23 can possibly lead us to verse 24. If, in verse 23, he is merely describing the fact that there is a conflict in the life of the believer, that would not lead to the cry "O wretched man!" There is nothing that leads to that cry except defeat, failure. "Wretched" is a cry of anguish and of hopelessness; there is a tinge of despair in it. The very word suggests this. All the Lexicons say so. "Wretched" means "exhausted as the result of hard labour." Paul has been striving until he is weary and tired out and wailing; and so he cries out "O wretched man that I am!" And then he cries out, "Who shall deliver me?"

In a most amazing way, again, Robert Haldane says at this point that this "shall" refers entirely to the future. He knows that he will never be delivered while he is in this life and in this world; but he knows that at the end, in death, Christ will finally deliver him out of the body and its thralldom, and he will have a glorified body. "Shall," he says, is entirely future. Such is the position in which you inevitably find yourself if you have started in the wrong way in your interpretation of this passage. This, surely, is not a reference to some remote distant future. Here is a man in anguish, in failure and exhaustion, who cries out, "Who shall deliver me?" "Who can deliver me?" He is not a man who is expressing a hope as to what is going to happen at death, he is crying out in despair for deliverance now.

The next expression to consider is, "the body of death." We need not linger over this. It is the same as "the law of sin in my members," of which Paul has just been speaking. At the end of verse 23 he says, "This is the trouble, that this other law in my members is bringing me into captivity to the law of sin that is in my members." Then, "Who shall deliver me from this law of sin that is in my members?," which he now calls "this body of sin," "this body of death." He wants deliverance from this part of himself that is opposed to the "inner man," to "the law of the mind." He wants to be delivered. In order to bring out the meaning I refer to Marcus Rainsford again, in order to bring out the positive exposition. He says "that Paul was really saying "O wretched man that I am!" to have anything in me contrary to my God, contrary to His Christ, contrary to His Cross, contrary to His Spirit, contrary to His will." In Rainsford's view, we see here the regenerate man, who finds intolerable the thought that there is in him anything contrary to God, and to all that pertains to God. To which my reply is this: Does a man who knows Christ as Savior, who knows the glory of the Cross, and who knows about the Spirit, simply cry out saying "Who shall deliver me?" Does he use this indefinite term "Who?" No, the man of whom Paul is speaking is a man who does not yet know who can deliver him. All he knows is that he cannot deliver himself. His knowledge of the Law cannot help him; he "delights" in it, but still it is of no value because this other "law" is too strong for him. So he says, "Who can? I cannot." The man who knows Christ as Saviour, and the work and power of the Holy Spirit as a reality, can never cry out vaguely and indefinitely and desperately, "Who can?" But this man asks and cries "Who can?" He is in trouble, he is in a desperate plight. All

these statements go together, and hang together, and each one comes out of the other. This man is wretched, conscious of complete failure, aware that there is this other power in his members that he cannot master but which is mastering him, and always taking him into captivity. He is a complete failure and hopeless, so he cries out in his anguish, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" He is not bemoaning the fact that there is still something in him "contrary to his God, his Christ, the Cross, the Spirit." On that other exposition all this has to be imported; but it is not present. It is present in the next chapter in great profusion, but not here. And yet we are concerned about the man who is described here, the man who is in a position in which he can simply cry out, "Who shall, can, will deliver me?" There he is! What astounds me is that these great men, because of the controlling theory with which they began, could allow themselves to resort to these twists and turnings of exposition.

We still have to glance at the remaining statements; and then we shall gather up all this evidence we have been accumulating, and try to collate it all, and put it all together, and see the composite picture of the man that is depicted here by the Apostle. We have seen something else; that it is the picture of a man who has come to see the spiritual nature and character of the Law.

## **ROMANS 7:25**

**"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." --**

Here, we come to the last verse, the last statement in this most extraordinary complex statement.

It is divided into two sections.

The first statement is, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." I have described that earlier as a kind of ejaculation. The Apostle is suddenly carried away by what is described so rightly as "a strong and sudden emotion of gratitude." We have had many occasions to observe and to emphasize the fact that the great Apostle was not over-punctilious in the matter of style. He was free and enjoyed the freedom of the Spirit. He was not a mere writer, not a mere literary man, not concerned, primarily,

to produce some masterpiece of literature. He was much more concerned about what he said than the way in which he said it. The Apostle never cultivated "art for art's sake," never attempted eloquence for the sake of eloquence. He shows this in these anacolutha, so called, these interruptions which frequently take the form of his bursting forth into praise and thanksgiving. He finds it difficult always, one gathers, to mention the Name of our Lord without uttering some kind of apostrophe. He interrupts what he is saying for the moment as he is carried away by the strength and the depth of his deep emotions. And here, it seems to me, that is what is happening. It occurred in this way. He had been saying, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" At that point he could not restrain himself so he cries out, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is a sudden outburst, an ejaculation, and not an essential part of what he is arguing and saying.

We can prove that quite simply by looking at the rest of the verse where he goes on to say, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." It proves my contention in this way, that if the expression "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" is an essential part of the argument it would mean that he is saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord for the fact that I myself with my mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." Now that is something, surely, that the Apostle could never say. That would be an "unnatural combination" of statements. It would not only be an "unnatural combination," it would be an impossible combination; because if you take them as being directly connected in that way it must mean that he thanks God in the Name of Jesus Christ for the fact that he is still in the condition he describes in the remainder of the verse. Surely that is quite impossible! The only commentator, as far as I am aware, who attempts to say that that is the order is Robert Haldane. He is quite consistent with himself right through. As I have suggested previously, he really went wrong in the 2nd verse of chapter 6 and has had to struggle to maintain consistency from that point. As we have already seen, he interprets "Who shall deliver me?" in verse 24, as referring entirely to the future. So he says that the Apostle is saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord that I shall be delivered"--not in this world but in the next. While still

in this world his position is, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." But it seems to me that that is an impossible interpretation of these statements. The "So then" in the second statement is a perfect summing up of what the Apostle has been saying from verse 14 to verse 24; a terse and concise statement about this duality. This, then, he says, is what it amounts to, "With the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

There is only one difficulty, not a vital one, but more or less mechanical, in the interpretation here; it relates to the expression, "I myself." He is undoubtedly referring to himself, the person; but does the "I myself" govern both the statements, the two parts of the one general statement? In other words, is he saying, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh I myself serve the law of sin?" It seems to me that, in the light of verse 23, we must so read the sentence. We cannot be certain about it. It could equally well be said that he is identifying himself, as he wants to do, with "the mind," and that "the mind" is the real "I" now; as if it read: "My real desire and will is to identify myself with the mind, but I find this other law in my members and so I have to admit that I serve the law of sin also." In other words he is not disclaiming responsibility, as we saw before. It is he who sins and not only his flesh. Of course, he has told us, "It is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me," but we have seen the explanation of that statement. He as a person is responsible for everything he does, but he is aware of these two "me's" within him as we saw in verse 18. Notice that the word he uses is the word "serve." It means "slave," "to be a slave to" or "a slave of," as we saw repeatedly in chapter 6. So he is saying, "With the mind I myself am a slave to, or slave it to, the law of God." He cannot say that he is only the slave of "the law of God," for he finds also that he is a slave to "the law of sin" because of his flesh. That is his trouble; that is the thing he has been telling us so frequently.

A question arises at this point which we shall have to consider when we come to our summing up--Is it possible for the regenerate man to make the statement of verse 25 in the light of chapter 6, verse 17, where he says, "But God be thanked that ye were the slaves of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered?" There he asserts very strongly that Christians are no longer slaves to sin. Indeed he goes on in the next verse to say, "Being then made free from

sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness." We shall consider the matter later in greater detail.

We have now reached the end of our detailed verse-by-verse consideration of this most interesting and difficult passage which starts at verse 14. Let us now look at it again as a whole.

First, let us try to have clearly in our minds the Apostle's main purpose. Leaving out the detail, what is his big statement concerning the man who is in view--whoever or whatever he may be--from verse 14 to the end of the chapter? We have seen very clearly that he is a man who is conscious of a duality within himself. The Apostle tells us so many times over. He is a man who has come to see that the Law of God is both spiritual and good; indeed he delights in it. But--and here is the problem--he cannot conform to it either positively or negatively. He desires to do the things it commands, but he finds that he cannot do so. He does not want to do the things it prohibits, but he finds that he does them. He sees clearly the character of the Law but he cannot keep it, the reason being that "the law of sin" which is in his members is too strong for him.

The Apostle has stated all this quite clearly in the following verses: in verse 17, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." This power of sin within him is stronger than himself, so much so that he can make this kind of statement. In verse 20 again, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Sin is too strong for him, it defeats him. But it is still more explicit in verse 23, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Now these statements have only one meaning. The "law of sin" which is in his members, that is to say, indwelling sin, is too strong for him, and brings him into a state of captivity. The final proof of that is the cry in verse 24. He is "a wretched man," and he breaks out into the cry, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And, finally, he sums it all up in the second part of verse 25, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." There is only one conclusion that he can come to about himself; it is the confession he made at the beginning of the whole section--"I am carnal; sold under sin." In other words, the business of verses 15-25 is to expound that statement. As so often with this Apostle--and with many another New Testament and even Old Testament writer--he starts with his conclusion

and then proves it and demonstrates it. He has told us at the beginning "I am carnal; sold under sin." That is the only conclusion at which this man can arrive about himself. Not only is there this duality within him, but he is made captive by the law of sin which is in his members. It is stronger than he is, it is defeating him, and he cries out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" That is the essential statement, the vital statement, which is made in this most fascinating paragraph.

Are we now in a position to decide, to arrive at a verdict, as to the identity of the person whom the Apostle is describing?

So we are left with the question, Is this, then, a description of the regenerate man? Is it true to say that the Apostle Paul was writing here about himself, and particularly about himself as he was at the time when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans? I mentioned previously the argument about the use of the present tense. Is it right to say that the regenerate man is always as here described, that he never rises at all above what is here described, and that it is indeed the Apostle Paul writing about himself at the height of his experience as an Apostle of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? What of that exposition? It is a very good rule when you are dealing with a difficult passage of Scripture such as this not to be too anxious to arrive at a decision solely and exclusively on the evidence that is before you. Whenever you meet with such a passage, the first thing you should ask yourself is, Are there similar passages elsewhere in the Scripture? Can I find any light on this problem that is confronting me by referring to other parts of Scripture--other parts of Scripture written by this same Apostle, or parts of Scripture by other writers? There is no better rule than to compare Scripture with Scripture when you have a difficult passage to interpret. Heresies have arisen in the Church because people have founded a whole doctrine on one verse, or one section, and have omitted to consult other sections of Scripture which deal with the same point. Let us observe the rule ourselves.

Our next step, therefore, is this. There are certain passages of Scripture which, it is argued, say exactly the same thing as the Apostle is saying here in the 7th chapter of Romans. So let us look at some of the passages to which reference is made. They can be readily divided into two groups. There are passages which seem to be describing the same kind of struggle as is described by the Apostle in this 7th chapter of

Romans. There is, for instance, the statement in the Epistle to the Galatians in chapter 5, verse 17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Let us admit at once that, at first sight, one is tempted to say "That is the very thing the Apostle has been saying here in Romans 7." There are these two sides, the "flesh lusting against the Spirit," and "the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other." Surely this is the same as saying that the mind on the one hand, and the law in the members on the other, are contrary the one to the other, with the result that you cannot do the things that you would. At first sight it seems to be an exact parallel, but the moment you examine it, and especially when you read the context, you will find that the two statements are indeed almost entirely different. Notice, for instance, that the Apostle introduces the statement in Galatians 5:17 by saying, in verse 16, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." In a sense there is no need for us to go any further. The Apostle lays down a fundamental proposition: "If you walk in the Spirit" (and I am commanding you to do so) you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." But what we are told in Romans 7 is, that in spite of every resolution to keep the Law of God, the man remains captive to "the law of sin which is in his members." And again, notice that there is a factor in the passage in Galatians which is not present at all in Romans 7. It is the reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Romans 7. The whole point of the passage in Galatians 5 is to emphasize the Spirit and His work. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." The Apostle's object in Galatians 5 is to show the way of victory, and not only to show it, but to guarantee it because of this other factor--the Holy Spirit who is within us. But that is not mentioned in Romans 7. But there is also another point of difference. In verse 18 of Galatians 5 there is what at first sight seems a strange statement, "But if you be led of the Spirit, you are not under the law." This verse is an exact parallel with what the Apostle says in Romans 6:14, which, as I have been emphasizing throughout, is as it were the key to the whole of Romans 7. Romans 7 is in a sense an exposition of Romans 6:14 which says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you," and for this reason, that "you are not under the law, but under grace." Paul is saying the same thing in Galatians 5:18, though in a different way. He is showing, not only the possibility of victory, but the certainty of victory to those who realize this truth about themselves in



Christ, and in "the Spirit." Then, to add still further proof, there is the statement in Galatians 5:24, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." There is not a word about that in Romans 7--not a word! But in Galatians he says that that is true of all Christians. Because they are Christ's they have done this; it has happened, they have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. The whole trouble with the man in Romans 7 is that he cannot do this. His problem is that the flesh is too much for him, and that he is being held captive all along to "the law of sin which is in his members."

We are entitled then to draw this conclusion, that Galatians 5, far from saying the same as Romans 7, not only says the exact opposite, but was designed to say the exact opposite. Romans 7 is concerned to show the state of failure of this man, who is trying, as it were, to sanctify himself by the Law. The whole point of Galatians 5 is to show us positively the success and the victory that attend the man who is sanctifying himself, and dealing with the problem within himself through the power of the Spirit. He is a man who is able to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts and has no excuse for failure. There is not a word about that in Romans 7; but it will come in chapter 8.

Now take another statement. It is found in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 26 and 27. The Apostle is describing men striving for mastery in a race--"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." This, again, is quoted because people feel that Paul is describing this same conflict within himself as is described in Romans 7. Now there is no question but that the Apostle was referring to himself, and to a present experience, when he wrote 1 Corinthians 9:27; but is that a parallel with Romans 7. In Romans 7 he says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." But in 1 Corinthians 9:27 he says, "I do keep my body under," "I beat it black and blue." That is what his words literally mean. "I pummel it, I punch it, I keep it under, and bring it into subjection." Again, it is the exact opposite of Romans 7. He does say, and we all must say, that the regenerate man does have a war to fight against sin. But the fact that he has a war to

wage does not mean that he is defeated. But the man in Romans 7 is defeated, in captivity, sold under sin. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 the Apostle says, "There is a battle, there is this tendency, sin is there; it is always ready to take an opportunity; but"--I am putting these words into the mouth of the Apostle because this is what he is really saying "but I do not allow sin to reign in my mortal body." He is in a position not to allow it to reign, in a position to "keep it under." "I myself keep it under, I keep my body in subjection, I keep it in order. I am running this race and I do not intend to be robbed of my prize; I keep under my body, and I bring it into subjection." The man of Romans 7 would have given the whole world if only he could have said that. But he could not say it; that was his problem, his tragedy. He was being brought into subjection by the law of sin that was in his members, in his body. It is the exact opposite of that depicted in 1 Corinthians 9:27.

Another passage is sometimes quoted. I refer to it, even though I do not think that it has any plausibility. It is found in Chapter 6 of the Epistle to the Ephesians, from verse 12 onwards, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Interpreters jump at the word "wrestle," because it seems to suggest what we have in Romans 7; the fight is on! But there are two answers to this. In Ephesians 6 Paul is not talking about a struggle against that which is in the flesh. He says as much. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood." That is not the essence of the problem he is considering. Rather does he say, "Our essential problem, in the last analysis, is not sin within us, but these evil forces, the devil and his cohorts that are outside us." And even with respect to that he says, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." As a Christian you can be strong, you can get a victory! "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," and defeat him. What would the man in Romans 7 give if he knew that, and could say that! But he did not know it; that was his whole trouble. Far from supporting the idea that the man of Romans 7 is regenerate, the whole point of Ephesians is to show that it is possible for the regenerate man to be victorious and to stand. "Having done all things, to stand (in the evil day)." He is a conqueror; he is not defeated.

These then are the passages that are so commonly quoted, because they seem to suggest the same kind of struggle as is described in Romans 7. I trust I have proved that they say the exact opposite.

We turn now to other passages that belong to a second group, and which seem to be similar to Romans 7 because they speak about "mourning" and about "groans." From them it is deduced that the regenerate man "groans" and "mourns," so surely they establish that Romans 7 is a description of such a man. The first is in chapter 8 of this same Epistle to the Romans, verses 13 and 16 in particular: "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit" (here is the regenerate man), "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Again: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." There is a perfect parallel, it is claimed, between these verses and "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

But are they parallel statements? To start with, notice that in Romans 8:23 there is this vital addition, which is absent from Romans 7--"We who have the first-fruits of the Spirit." Not a word about that is to be found in Romans 7! But the argument does not depend upon that alone. The answer to this interpretation is simply this, that in the relevant section in Romans 8 the Apostle is not considering the struggle which a man has with sin within himself, but his struggle with sin in the world, sin in circumstances, sin in trials and troubles and tribulations that come to us in this life. Let me prove that. Go back to verse 17 in chapter 8; "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him." 'suffer with Christ"! The words cannot mean suffering because of sin in the body, because Christ never did suffer in that way. In this context Paul in Romans 8:17 onwards is dealing with "suffering with him, that we may be also glorified together." Observe what he goes on to say: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time" (the sufferings in which we find ourselves in this world) "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And to make it doubly certain he says, "For the earnest expectation of the creature" (the brute, the animal creation) "waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity"--he means now, the animals

and everything that is in the brute creation--"not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." Do these words indicate a fight against indwelling sin? Do the animals have to fight against indwelling sin? Of course they do not. What they have to fight is, "nature red in tooth and claw." The Apostle refers to the kind of "agony" of the cosmos, the struggle in the whole of life that entered in because of the Fall, and because, when man sinned, God "cursed the ground." This struggle belongs to the whole of nature and creation; "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." In other words, though the Christian is redeemed and regenerate he is living in a world of sin, a world of sorrow, a world of pain, a world of suffering, a world of evil, ugliness, foulness; and he is subject to illnesses and diseases. This is the theme of Romans 8:17-23. The Apostle does not even consider there the problem which is dealt with in Romans 7. But how frequently is this missed simply because he uses the word "groaneth."

"But what about 2 Corinthians 5?" asks someone. In verse 2 we read, "For in this tabernacle we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked." Then again in verse 4, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." Again it is claimed that this is a similar case to that of the "wretched man" of Romans 7. It is argued that the burden is the load of sin, the "sin that is in my members," this thing that is leading me into captivity. Here, it is claimed, the regenerate man is speaking, and we seem to be told that he is "groaning" because of his burden of sin, and longing for his glorification.

What is the answer? Here again, however, I must point out that the Apostle is not speaking of the subject with which he is dealing in Romans 7. His theme is the same as that of Romans 8, verses 18 to 26. The context proves this. Paul begins on the theme of 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 in the 7th verse of chapter 4 of that letter: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted . . . " He is dealing with things outside himself, not inside himself--"persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. We which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus" sake." This describes the kind of life Paul was living externally then. "So death worketh in us, but life in you." "All things are for your sakes . . . For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. Our light affliction"--that is to say, the things outside ourselves--"which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And to prove that they are outside, he says, "While we look not at the things which are seen" (outside us), "but at the things which are not seen." And then follows the 1st verse in chapter 5, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved" if they kill us, if they martyr us--"we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." So in this Corinthian passage the Apostle is dealing with the trials and the tribulations, the persecutions and the sufferings of Christian people because they are Christians. It is not at all the same problem, the same question, as is dealt with in Romans 7.

But I have a further reason for speaking in this way. If you look for the word "groaned" in the Scripture and say that every time you find a Christian man "groaning" or "being burdened" it describes of necessity the struggle against sin within, then you will find yourself saying that our Lord Himself had a struggle against sin within. The evidence is as follows. Isaiah reminds us in his 53rd chapter that the Saviour when He comes, will be "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." And when He came He was such. For example, we read in Mark 9:19 that when He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and saw His disciples arguing with the people in the presence of a man whose son was afflicted with terrible fits, He said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" Again, look at the account of our Lord at Bethany at the sepulchre of His friend Lazarus, in John's Gospel, chapter 11, verse 33 onwards, "When he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." Indeed in verse 35 we read, "Jesus wept." He was burdened, He groaned in the depth of His spirit, He was troubled in His spirit and He wept. Look at Him some time later in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is what we

find; "And being in an agony he sweat as it were drops of blood." Our Lord certainly "groaned" when He was in this world. And we "in this tabernacle," says Paul, "we do groan, being burdened." The Lord "groaned in spirit" for the same reason. Not because of "sin in the members," but because this is a world of sin, because of all that sin has done to God's world.

Why did Christ weep and groan at the grave of Lazarus? "Oh, it was His natural human sympathy," says someone. But that cannot be, because He knew that He was about to raise Lazarus and restore him to his sisters. No, He wept because He was face to face with this horrible thing called death that had come into the world as the result of sin, and which was going to lead in a short while to His own death and separation from the Father. That is the meaning of "Jesus wept," that is why He "groaned and was troubled in spirit," though He knew He was going to raise Lazarus. He was looking at sin and its consequences in the world, looking at sin objectively as Paul does in Romans 8:18-23, and also in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. Indeed the Apostle puts this quite explicitly in the Epistle to the Colossians in chapter 1, verse 24, where he says, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church." That is exactly the same thing. He has entered into such intimate communion with His Lord and Saviour that he really feels something of what the Lord Christ suffered when He was in this evil world. The sight of it all, and the realization of it all, made him groan. "In this tabernacle we do groan, being burdened." Though we are saved, and rejoicing in that salvation," the world is nevertheless a "vale of tears," a "land of woe." That is what the Apostle says in Romans 8 and also in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5.

We conclude therefore that the statements I have quoted which, because they have this idea of burden and trouble and tribulation and agony and groaning, appear on the surface to be saying what Paul is saying in Romans 7, clearly and definitely do not deal with the same subject at all, and therefore have no relevance in the question of deciding who exactly is "the man" described in Romans 7, verses 14 to 25. We shall go on to show that, if these verses are interpreted as applying to a regenerate man, that interpretation is incompatible with the plain teaching of this Apostle elsewhere with regard to the regenerate man. And after that we

shall show that it is incompatible also with the teaching of other New Testament writers concerning the regenerate man. And even when that matter is resolved we shall still be left with the suggestion that Romans, chapter 7, is the description of an immature Christian who has not yet gone on to receive the "second blessing." That is a very much simpler question which can be disposed of much more easily.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **ROMANS 7:13-25**

"Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not, for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law, in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

We are engaged in the task of summing up our conclusions concerning the exact meaning of this famous portion of Scripture.

We have gone through it in detail, verse by verse, and have also summed up the essential statement made by the Apostle. In attempting to decide whether the reference is to the unregenerate man or to a regenerate man--even Paul himself when he wrote the letter--or whether it is a description of an immature Christian, we felt that the best plan to adopt was to see whether we could find other passages in Scripture which would throw any light on the matter. We have found that passages

which, on the surface, seem to describe the same conflict, and others which seem to describe the same "groaning" and state of misery, do not really provide us with a parallel to what we find in this section.

The next step is to show that, if this passage is interpreted as describing Paul's experience at his best and highest, even as he was when he wrote this Epistle, then it is incompatible with his plain teaching elsewhere, indeed with plain teaching elsewhere in the Bible, not only by the Apostle Paul, but by other writers also concerning the nature of the regenerate man.

FIRST, let us look at passages in the writings of the Apostle Paul himself, which. I suggest, exclude the possibility that he is describing his mature Christian experience in Romans 7.

Take first the Apostle's other statements in this same Epistle. The evidence is abundant. I begin with chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, where he says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." We emphasized there the "standing"--not a crouching or a slouching or a lying down we "stand" in this grace, "and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Surely the man who could write that could not at the same time cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Furthermore, verses 12 to 21 in the same chapter emphasize "the triumph of the reign of grace." Though "sin has abounded," "grace has much more abounded." The victory, the triumph, the certainty, the assurance of it all! This is the Apostle's central message, his main reason for writing the passage. "Much more" he keeps on repeating--"much more hath grace abounded." It is always "abounding" and "superabounding." There is no compatibility between emphasizing the "superabounding" power and capacity of grace and crying out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The two things do not fit together in the same person.

When we come to chapter 6, we find that practically everything Paul says is incompatible with the interpretation I am opposing. In verse 2, for example, he replies to the question, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" by saying "God forbid. How shall we that died to sin live any longer therein?" But here in this second section of chapter 7 is a man



who is "brought into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members." But in chapter 6, verse 2, he says that this is impossible for the Christian. Having died to sin, it is impossible for him to continue in sin any longer. Paul says the same in verse 6: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed (disannulled, brought to nothing) that henceforth we should not serve sin." That is the whole object of salvation, and that is the cause of his rejoicing. In verse 7 he repeats the same truth: "For he that is dead is freed from sin." Then follows the great exhortation in verse 11, "Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." What possible interpretation is there of that, if this section in chapter 7 is a description of the regenerate man at his very best? Similarly the exhortations in verses 12 and 13 would become quite meaningless. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body"--we must not allow it to reign there; there is no need for us to allow it to reign there--"that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin." There is no need for us to do so, we can stop doing so; we must stop doing so. But in Romans 7 we have a man who tells us that he cannot help himself, that he is brought into captivity constantly by this power which is greater than himself. Then there is the great assertion of verse 14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." It is the very antithesis of this particular interpretation of verses 13 to 25 of the 7th chapter.

But look once more at chapter 6. Take verse 17: "But God be thanked, ye were the slaves of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." Then verse 18: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness." Verse 22, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Such words are not at all compatible with the statement "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do." The man cannot do what he wants to do, he does what he does not want to do. "O wretched man that I am!" It is really astonishing that anyone who has worked carefully through chapter 6 could conceivably say that in chapter 7, verses 13-25 describe the regenerate man at the height of his experience. The appeal in the 19th

verse of the 6th chapter would likewise be quite pointless, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh; for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." That appeal is obviously addressed to those who have the ability to respond, and not to helpless, hopeless, defeated captives of sin.

Look next at this very chapter in which this section comes. I argue that verses 4 and 6 are completely incompatible with that suggested view of verses 14 to 25. Verse 4 reads, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also died to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." Verse 6, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that (in order that) we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." These great assertions make it quite impossible for us to interpret these later verses in the manner proposed.

Then move on to chapter 8, verses 1 and 2: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." In verses 13 to 25 of chapter 7 Paul says that the Law leads him constantly to "sin" and to "death." But he says in verse 3 of chapter 8 that he has been set free. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin" has done just that. He has "condemned sin in the flesh, that (in order that) the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." Not that we should go on failing, but that "it might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Here Paul is describing the regenerate man; and his words cannot be reconciled with the interpretation of verses 14-25, chapter 7, which I oppose.

Again, look at verse 6 of chapter 8: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." The man of Romans 7 has no peace. "No," he says, "I am always being led into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Is such a man enjoying peace? But the Apostle says that the great characteristic of the man who is spiritually minded, that is, the regenerate man, is that he has "life and peace." It is the exact opposite of this man who could not find peace, and who cries out in his agony "O

wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

Then we move on to verse 13 and others in chapter 8 where Paul makes an appeal. He says, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." The implication there, is that as Christians we can do what he enjoins, and therefore he tells us to do so. But the whole trouble with the man in Romans 7 is that he cannot do it. He has been trying, and he has failed completely, he is still in captivity; but in chapter 8 we see a man who has found a way of freedom and of life.

Then go on further to verses 14 and onwards: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." Who is in bondage? The man who is "in captivity" is in "bondage." Who is the man that is "afraid?" He is the man who says, "What is going to happen to me? What can I do? I try, I want to, but I cannot," and he cries out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" But to the regenerate the Apostle says, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, where by we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." If that is true of me, am I to go on to say "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" These things are utter incompatibilities, they do not breathe the same atmosphere, they do not belong together at all. No, this man, the regenerate man, the Apostle Paul when he was writing, was not "hopeless," not "wretched"; he knows his position and "rejoices in hope of the glory of God."

Then go on to verses 29 and 30. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified." Now watch the leap--"and whom he justified, them he also glorified." A man who understands justification knows that, in a sense, he is already glorified. Can such a man cry out "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" It is inconceivable, it is impossible. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." If I know that I am "foreknown" and "predestinated," I know that I shall be "conformed to the

image of his Son." I do not cry out in despair, "Who shall deliver me?" because I already know the answer. A wrong interpretation of chapter 7 renders the whole of this great 8th chapter quite impossible, and especially that leap from "justification" to "glorification."

In chapter 12 there are further statements that I cannot reconcile with other interpretations. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies even a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." That statement would be enough in itself, if we had nothing else, to yield a correct interpretation. In chapter 14:17 Paul says, "The kingdom of God (into which Christians have come) is not meat and drink." It is not a matter of eating this and not eating that, and of observing days and various other punctilious; but the kingdom is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." That is Christianity; the Christian is to know "righteousness, and peace, and joy "in the Holy Ghost." Can a man have "the joy of the Holy Ghost," and at the same time say, "I am constantly being brought into captivity by the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Surely the two conditions cannot possibly co-exist in the same person.

Thus far I have produced evidence from the Epistle to the Romans itself. Let us now turn to the evidence in the other writings of the Apostle Paul. I have already quoted 1 Corinthians 9:27, where he says, "I keep under my "body." But look at what appears to me to be the final answer to this particular argument in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, which almost seems to have been written specially to deal with the very question we are considering. Look at what Paul says in verses 6 and 7 where his theme is Law and Gospel, death and life. Observe his negative--"not of the letter, but of the spirit . . . the letter killeth." The trouble with the man in Romans 7 is that he was being killed by the Law. He says in verse 10 of chapter 7, "What was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death." But Paul tells the Corinthians that "The law killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." Then take the phrase at the beginning of verse 7, "the ministration of death." Paul is writing about the Law of God, "written and graven in stones," and is actually saying that God's holy Law given through Moses was nothing

other than "the ministration of death"; and for the very reason that is found in Romans 7--"That which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death." The trouble with the man in Romans 7 is that he is being killed by the Law. He is made to sin by it; he is killed by it. So here the Apostle actually uses this quite astonishing phrase, "the ministration of death," for the Law of God. But look at the end of that chapter, verses 17 and 18. "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is"--it can also be translated "Where the Spirit is Lord"--"there is liberty." In other words, I am not "brought into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," I am no longer in the flesh; the Spirit is in me, and "the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

But the Apostle is not content with saying that only; he adds to it in the 18th verse. "But we all (the regenerate) with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord . . . ." This is the regenerate man, not crying out "Who shall deliver me?" but "with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." What happens? "(We) are changed into the same image (the Lord's image) from glory to glory." We are progressing and developing; at the end of our lives and when we are approaching the topmost rung of the ladder of sainthood we do not say "O wretched man that I am." No; it is rather "we are changed from glory to glory" -- increasing, developing, advancing, going up--"even as by the Spirit of the Lord." You cannot equate that with what is said in Romans 7, 14-25; surely they are exact opposites!

Then turn to Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20: "I have been crucified with Christ." This does not describe a second experience; it is what happens to every man who is regenerate. "I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is how the regenerate man speaks. He does not say "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"; he says, "Christ liveth in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Then in Galatians, chapter 4, "Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." We see here a man "under the law"; but though a child of the family he resembles a servant. Indeed he may be tyrannized over by the servants, he may be having a very miserable time, though he is the heir. "He is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the

elements of the world. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." And because we are sons, do we cry out saying, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" No! "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." You cannot reconcile these words with the statement in Romans 7:14 to 25. Again in chapter 5, from verse 16 to the end of the chapter: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh . . . But if we be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law . . . They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Such is the teaching concerning the regenerate in Galatians.

In Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 19, the Apostle tells the believers that he is praying for them, "that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened." He wishes them to know "what is the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward who believe." He knew it himself; he prays that they may know it. Here is Paul the Apostle, who knows "the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward that believe," the same power, the Apostle says, that God exercised "in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world that is to come." Then Paul adds: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things unto the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Is it conceivable that a man who knows something about "the exceeding greatness" of this power towards himself can cry out, saying "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"--from this thing that is "bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members?" Surely we are in a different world altogether; the whole situation is entirely changed.

At the end of Ephesians chapter 3, the Apostle prays again for these same regenerate people: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is

the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fulness of God." And he continues, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages." Does the man who writes in that way say at another time, "Ah yes, but it is equally true of me to say 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'" Surely that is quite impossible! The same can be said of the remainder of the Epistle to the Ephesians, from chapter 4, verse 17 onwards.

But turn to Philippians, chapter 4, verse 4. What kind of people are Christians? judge from the following words: "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." Can you "rejoice in the Lord always" if you are conscious that you are brought constantly into captivity to "the law of sin that is in your members," and are crying out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" These things do not belong together.

Then in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians -- probably the first Epistle the Apostle ever wrote--chapter 1:5; "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance: as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost; so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.; Then in the 4th chapter, verse 3: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." And in chapter 5, verse 23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the Apostle's teaching.

I end this summary of Paul's teaching with a reference to the man himself. When he speaks of himself, this is his favourite phrase: "Paul, the bond-slave of Jesus Christ." You will find it generally at the beginning of his letters. Is it possible that a man who describes himself in that way should cry out at the same time, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" He has been bought, he belongs to the Lord; he is a "bond-slave." Listen to him as he writes to the Philippians: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). Or consider the astonishing things he says about himself later in the same Epistle: "Brethren, I count not myself

to have apprehended"--"but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (3:13,14). He is not constantly turning round in a circle and crying out for deliverance; he is "pressing forward." "Let us therefore," he says, "as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me" (vv. 15-17). Could a man who says of himself, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" have the effrontery to stand up and say "Brethren, be ye followers of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample?" It seems to me quite incongruous. Then in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians; "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe" (2:10). I cannot reconcile that with the condition of the man in Romans 7.

And that brings me to my last statement concerning this great man. We are told that Romans 7:14 ff. describes Paul at his best, at his highest, nearing the end of his Christian life. But we find that at the end of his life he is able to write in a very different strain. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8 he could say: "I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Can a man who says that still say of himself, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It is a sheer impossibility. There, then, is the evidence for my contention from the writings of the Apostle Paul.

But let us turn to the writings of the Apostle John. The entire argument of his First Epistle, written to regenerate people, is the exact opposite of what is stated here. Why does John write his First Epistle? He supplies his own answer: "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full," and that "you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." He and the other apostles were enjoying that fellowship and he wants all Christians to enjoy it. It is impossible to reconcile this with the statement in Romans 7. Then look at John's 3rd chapter and what he says in verse 9:



"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin (doth not go on committing sin), for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin (continue committing sin) because he is born of God." And verse 21; "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." But the man in Romans 7 is utterly condemned by his heart. The same truth emerges in chapter 5, verses 4 and 5: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" And then verse 18: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not" (does not go on living a life of sin and failure) "but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (in the evil one). "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." Am I to add to that, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Impossible!

The Apostle Peter teaches the same truth in his Second Epistle, chapter 1, verses 4-10: "All things," he says, "that pertain to life and godliness, have been given to us: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." In the light of that, says Peter, this is what you have to do: "Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The trouble with the man in Romans 7 was that he lacked that knowledge. "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." These are descriptions of the Christian man, the regenerate man.

Finally, to confirm what I am saying, I would quote our Lord's own teaching. In Matthew 11:28 he says: "Come unto me, all ye that labour

and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He gives rest to the man who cries, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?," and who is always being "led into captivity by the law of sin which is in his members." To such a labouring and heavy-laden and unhappy man our Lord says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." It is the exact opposite of Romans 7. Then consider Luke 4 and the account of our Lord's reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue at Nazareth after his return from the Temptation in the Wilderness. He read out of Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." This being read, He closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And he began to say, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." That is what He had come to do, and He claimed to be doing it. That is what He does to all who believe in Him. He delivers the "captives" and those that are bruised; He gives sight to the blind. They are no longer "wretched."

Then there is the notable statement in John's Gospel, chapter 7, verses 37-39: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst"--If any man is longing and thirsting for righteousness, and the power to live according to the Law, if any man is wretched and unhappy and feels he is a captive to sin--"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The Christian believer is not only right in himself, he is able to send out these streams of blessing and of fructification to others. "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

Now take the 8th chapter, verse 12; "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness"--he shall not be groping in darkness and saying, "O where can I find deliverance? Who shall deliver me?"-- "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." But look at the still more wonderful verses 34-36 in that same 8th chapter: "Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin"--whosoever goes on living the defeated,

failing life, a captive to the sin which is in his members--"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." That is precisely what the man in Romans 7 says about himself. Our Lord continues: "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." In other words, he will never say again, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Our Lord says it again in chapter 10, verses 9 and 10: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture"--full satisfaction! "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "O wretched man! who shall deliver me from this bondage, this captivity, this body of death?" . . . "Life and that more abundantly." What a complete contrast!

All the Scriptures in their accounts and descriptions of the regenerate man teach the exact opposite of what we find here in Romans 7. But we must go further. I suggest that to interpret Romans 7 in terms of the regenerate man -- Paul at his best is indeed to place the regenerate man at his best in an inferior position to the saints of God under Old Testament teaching. The man in Romans 7 is in a more desperate position even than David in Psalm 51. David had committed the terrible sin of adultery, and then murder on top of that. He knows what he has done, and he knows that he is guilty; but he does not cry out in despair, "Who shall deliver me?" He wants a clean heart, and is amazed at himself that he could have done such things. "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." His prayer is, "Take not thy holy Spirit from me." He was aware of an essential principle of righteousness. He has fallen, but he is not in despair about it; he is not in the position of the man in Romans 7. Psalm 119 also contains verses which make this faulty exposition quite impossible, as for example, verses 49-65, 97-104, 121, 165-168. We can all work the argument out for ourselves.

But look at the matter from still another angle. If Romans 7 is a description of the regenerate man at his best, then I say that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Gospel have not been fulfilled. In Isaiah 35 we read that when the Messiah comes, when the Gospel age arrives, "the lame man shall leap as an hart," "the blind will see." "There shall be a way, an highway, it shall be called The way of holiness; the unrighteous man shall not walk upon it; but the wayfaring man, though a

fool, shall not err therein." Such words describe what the Gospel effects. But Romans 7 does not speak thus. Or listen to what the Gospel does, as described in Isaiah 61: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." In such words Isaiah had already answered Romans 7 nearly eight centuries beforehand. These are the blessings of the Gospel dispensation: beauty, joy, praise! It is the very antithesis of "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that if you interpret Romans 7 as referring to the regenerate man you are really excluding the doctrine of sanctification altogether. Or if not that, it certainly excludes the possibility of any growth in sanctification.

The argument is: that the more a man advances in the Christian life the more he is aware of sin within him, and the more he therefore mourns. So it comes to this, that the more Christian a man becomes the more miserable he becomes, and the highest point he reaches will mark the greatest depth of his misery. Where then is "growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord?" That interpretation really amounts to this, that the main effect of the Gospel upon man is to increase his misery. The greater the awareness of sin the greater the misery; therefore the main effect of the Gospel is to increase misery; and the New Testament man must be more miserable than the Old Testament man. It is quite ridiculous, it is impossible.

In conclusion I would say this. The REAL CLUE to the understanding of this passage in Romans 7 is to notice that the Holy Spirit and the indwelling Christ are not mentioned; hence the trouble and the problem. The Holy Spirit, as the quotations have proved, is the great antagonist of the "flesh" and of "sin." He gives the victory. But He is not mentioned here; and as the indwelling Christ and the Holy Spirit within are not mentioned, this cannot therefore be a full statement as to the condition and the experience of Paul at the time of writing. Here we have a man who is analysing himself, and the "me" and the "me" within him. It is a complete analysis. But when Paul analyses himself he says, "Yet not I, but Christ that dwelleth in me." This man does not mention Christ. It is clearly not an analysis of Paul at the time of writing, or of the Christian at his best. That is impossible, for such a man must mention the indwelling

## Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But it is said that it is simply one aspect of Paul. He is not speaking here, they say, of the whole of himself; you have to take chapter 8 with this chapter to have the whole Paul. But this man in Romans 7 is definitely and specifically talking about himself, and the whole of himself. He has analysed himself-- the "me" and the "me" and the "I." It is the complete man. So that argument cannot prevail either. In my view, to say that Paul is describing only one aspect of himself here makes it incompatible with what he says about himself as a Christian in the first 17 verses of chapter 8.

"Ah but," says someone, "why not the two at the same time?" I have already answered that objection. If a man already knows the answer, why does he cry out, "Who shall deliver me?" If he knows that Christ does, and can, deliver him, why does he cry out "Who shall deliver me?" It makes the position nonsensical. If Paul knows everything that he says in chapter 8 while he is describing himself in chapter 7, why does he give this description at all? Why does he not say that he is speaking of "one aspect of my life, one part of me?" But he does not say this. He is giving a full description of a certain man, and it is quite incompatible with that of the regenerate man in chapter 8. The man in chapter 8 cannot use the expressions that Paul uses in verse 14 of chapter 7 where he says, "I am carnal, sold under sin." He cannot cry out in despair, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" When the Christian, the regenerate man, falls into sin, he does not say "This is terrible, I am filled with despair, O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" He speaks of himself, as he should speak, in terms of the First Epistle of John: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)" "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2). The Christian speaks in this way; he never cries out in despair.

The Christian knows that he has to fight sin; Paul has dealt with that matter in chapter 6. The Christian's fight with sin is described there, and in the first part of chapter 8, not in this section in chapter 7. But notice that the picture in chapter 6 is of a man who can be confident. He is not a despairing fighter; he is on top. In the Christian sin is not a master, and

he its slave. Sin to the Christian is an annoyance, a nuisance; it is something that worries him, and sometimes trips him up; but it never drives him to despair. He should never go back "under the law," never feel "hopeless." Not only do I assert that it is not a regenerate man speaking in Romans 7, I maintain that a Christian must never speak in that way. Indeed Paul's whole object in writing was to teach people that they should never speak in that way. And if that is his object in writing how can he possibly be writing about himself? The thing is ludicrous. No, this was not Paul's experience at the height of his saintliness.

Well, says someone, if that is not the case, why not say, then, that it is a picture of the incomplete Christian? Why not say that it is a regenerate man who has not yet had the "second blessing," a man who is "justified" but not yet "sanctified"; in other words, that the man is an immature Christian? The simple answer to that is, that there is no indication whatsoever of that in the Apostle's words. He does not say that he is describing himself as he once was, and before he "passed over" to Romans 8. If he were doing so, he would not be using the present tense; he would be using the past tense, and saying, I was like that once upon a time. He has written in that manner in verses 7-13 where he was describing a past experience.

No, that is not the answer. That view, of course, is based on the fallacy that a man can be justified without being sanctified. It is based on the false view which drives a wedge between the two and says that we can have the one without the other. But that is not the teaching of Paul. He teaches that if we are justified we are "in Christ," we are married to Him, we are no longer "under the law," His power is working in us. That is the entire teaching of chapter 6, and chapter 7:1-6. He cannot go back on what he has already said; that is quite impossible. Furthermore, that view is based upon a further fallacy. However young a Christian a man may be, however immature, it is impossible for him to utter the cry of verse 24. Even the man who has the first glimmerings of an understanding and knowledge will never cry out, "Who shall deliver me?" He has already believed that Christ is his Saviour, so he does not say "Who?"; he turns to Christ. But that view, also, with its superficiality, imagines that, when you turn from chapter 7 to chapter 8, all your problems are solved, you never have any more difficulty and never any more struggle; whereas Paul in chapter 8, verse 13, says, "But if through the Spirit ye do mortify

the deeds of the body, ye shall live." You have got to do that; it is not all done for you after you have had the "second blessing," and have "handed it all over to Christ." No! "If you, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

What, then, is the position? The Apostle is not describing his own experience here; but, as I have continued to repeat, he is concerned to tell us a number of things about the Law, and to show us that the Law cannot save in any respect; it cannot justify, it cannot sanctify. That is his one object in the whole of the passage. His interest is in the Law. In verse 5 he says that the Law makes us sin more than ever; in verse 13 he says "the law kills me." He knew he would be criticized and misunderstood over this, so he answers the objections. That is all he is doing; and he puts it in this dramatic form. He personalizes the whole argument. He says in effect, "If you say that the Law was meant to save, and can save, the position you leave me in is this, that I know that the Law is spiritual. Yes, but I am carnal; what can I do? What is the point of knowing that the Law is spiritual? I approve it, I want to carry it out, but I cannot; I am paralysed. That is my position; you are leaving me there."

What sort of man is Paul describing therefore? He is describing a man who is experiencing an intense conviction of sin, a man who has been given to see, by the Spirit, the holiness of the Law; and he feels utterly condemned. He is aware of his weakness for the first time, and his complete failure. But he does not know any more. He is trying to keep the Law in his own strength, and he finds that he cannot. He therefore feels condemned; he is under conviction. He does not know, he does not understand the truth about the Gospel, about salvation in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the experience of large numbers of people, sometimes of people who have been reading a book on Revival, or the biography of some great saint. Suddenly they are brought under conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit. They see that the whole of their past is wrong, that it is loss. They see the meaning of the Law for the first time. They have lost their self-righteousness, they are "dead," they are "killed" by the Law; and they then try to put themselves right, but they cannot do so. They may remain like that for days and for weeks, even for years. Then the truth about Christ and His full salvation is revealed to them, and they find peace and joy and happiness and power. They glory in Christ and His Cross and

offer up their praise. All we can say for certain is that they are under deep conviction of sin. But they have not seen the truth clearly even about justification, let alone about sanctification. This man is under the condemnation of the Law, and feeling his utter hopelessness, and helplessness, and spiritual death. He is "under" what the Apostle calls "the law of sin and death."

Why did the Apostle write all that?

He did so for two reasons;

FIRSTLY, to answer the charge that was brought against him that he was dismissing the Law of God, and saying that it was evil.

But he had a SECOND and a much stronger reason which he has given us in the first six verses of the chapter. It was to show us that there is a way of sure deliverance in Christ; that which he had already said in verse 14 of chapter 6: "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Chapter 7 is an exposition and elaboration of that theme. "All is well," Paul seems to say, "you are not under the law. You are like the woman whose husband is dead; you are dead to the law, and you are married to another, even to him that was raised from the dead, who is full of life and power, and will produce children out of you. He will impregnate you, he will put his life into you, and you shall bear fruit unto God. You will no longer be seeking to do this "under the law." You have been delivered from that in which you were held, and you will serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (verses 1-6). Such is his great and glorious message; and in these verses from 7 to the end of the chapter we have nothing but two parentheses in which he deals with difficulties, and nothing else. He will go on in chapter 8 to give us his experience as a regenerate man in Christ Jesus, who has been "made free from the law of sin and death" and who is now able to do what he could not do before because of the weakness of the flesh. This, then, is the position. This section is but a parenthesis to show us in a clear and dramatic way what the Law could not do because it was "weak through the flesh." Thank God, this is not the picture of the regenerate man! The regenerate man is the man I have been depicting and describing in the many quotations from this Epistle and the other Epistles, and the writings of other Apostles, and above all, in the words of the Lord of Glory Himself who said, "If the Son shall make



you free, ye shall be free indeed."

THE END.